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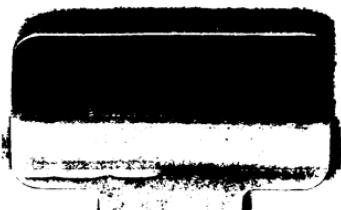
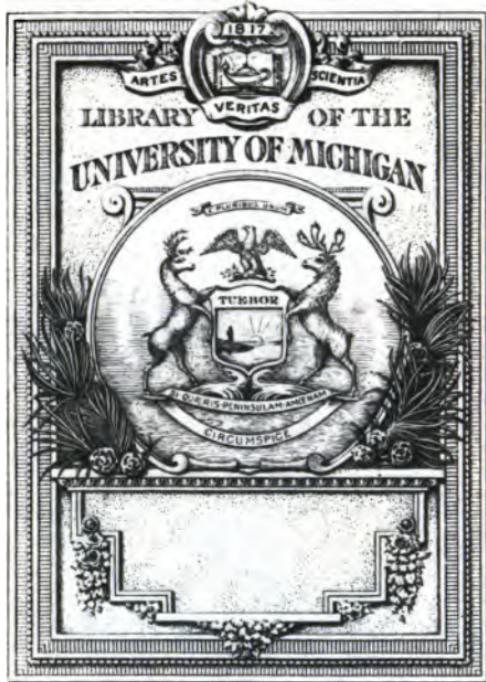
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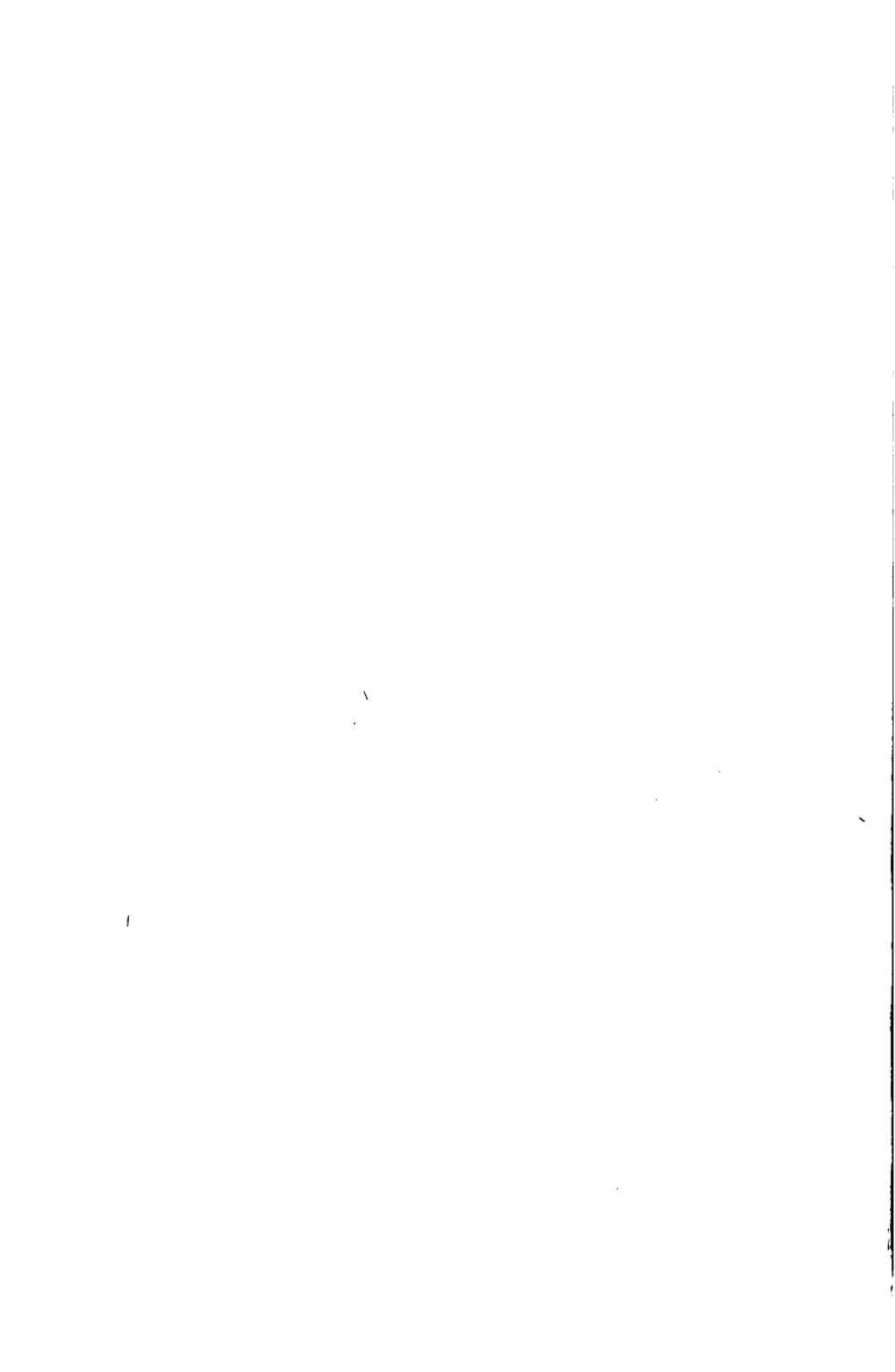
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COMEDIES OF WORDS  
AND  
OTHER PLAYS

BY  
ARTHUR SCHNITZLER

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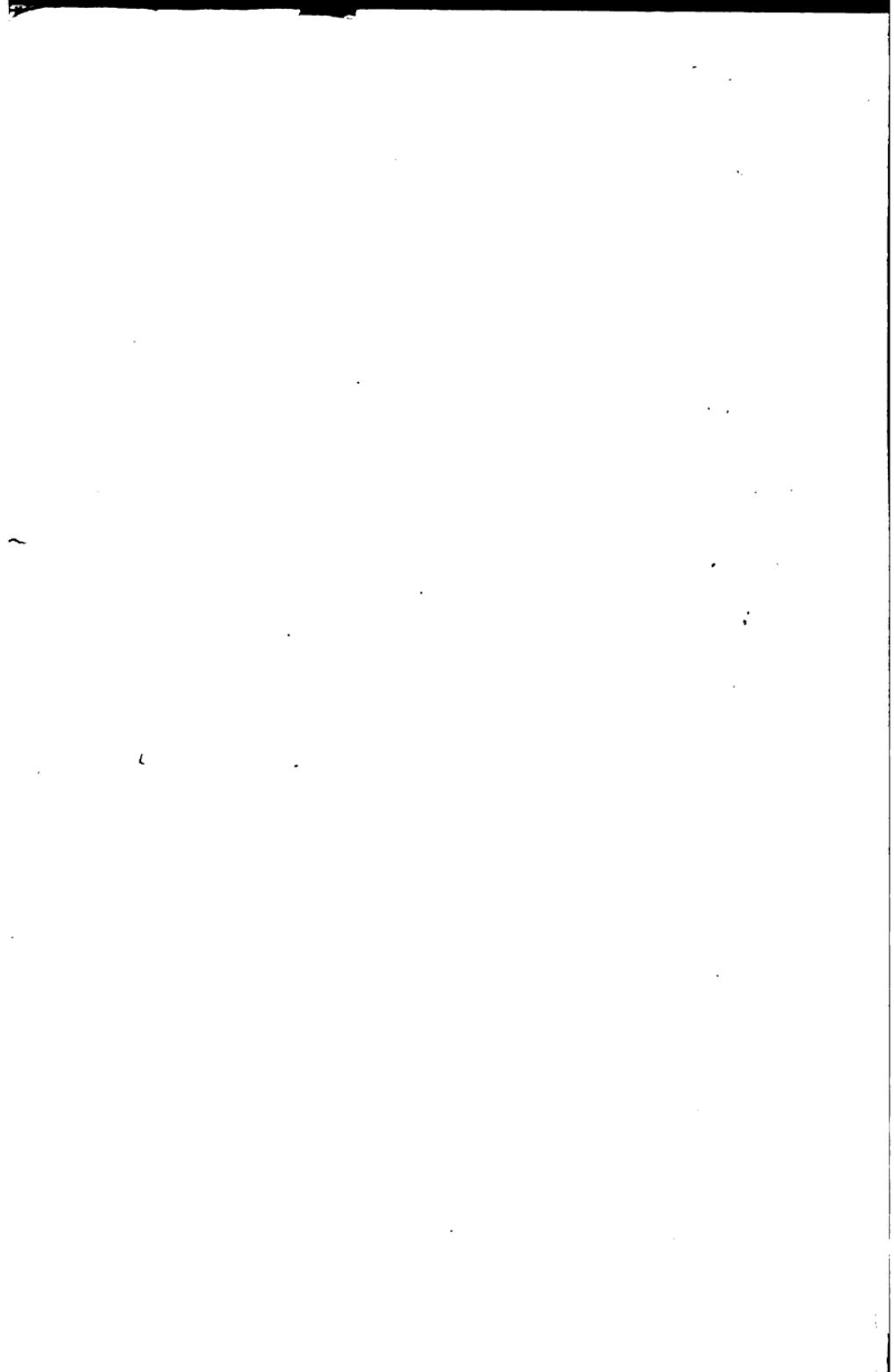
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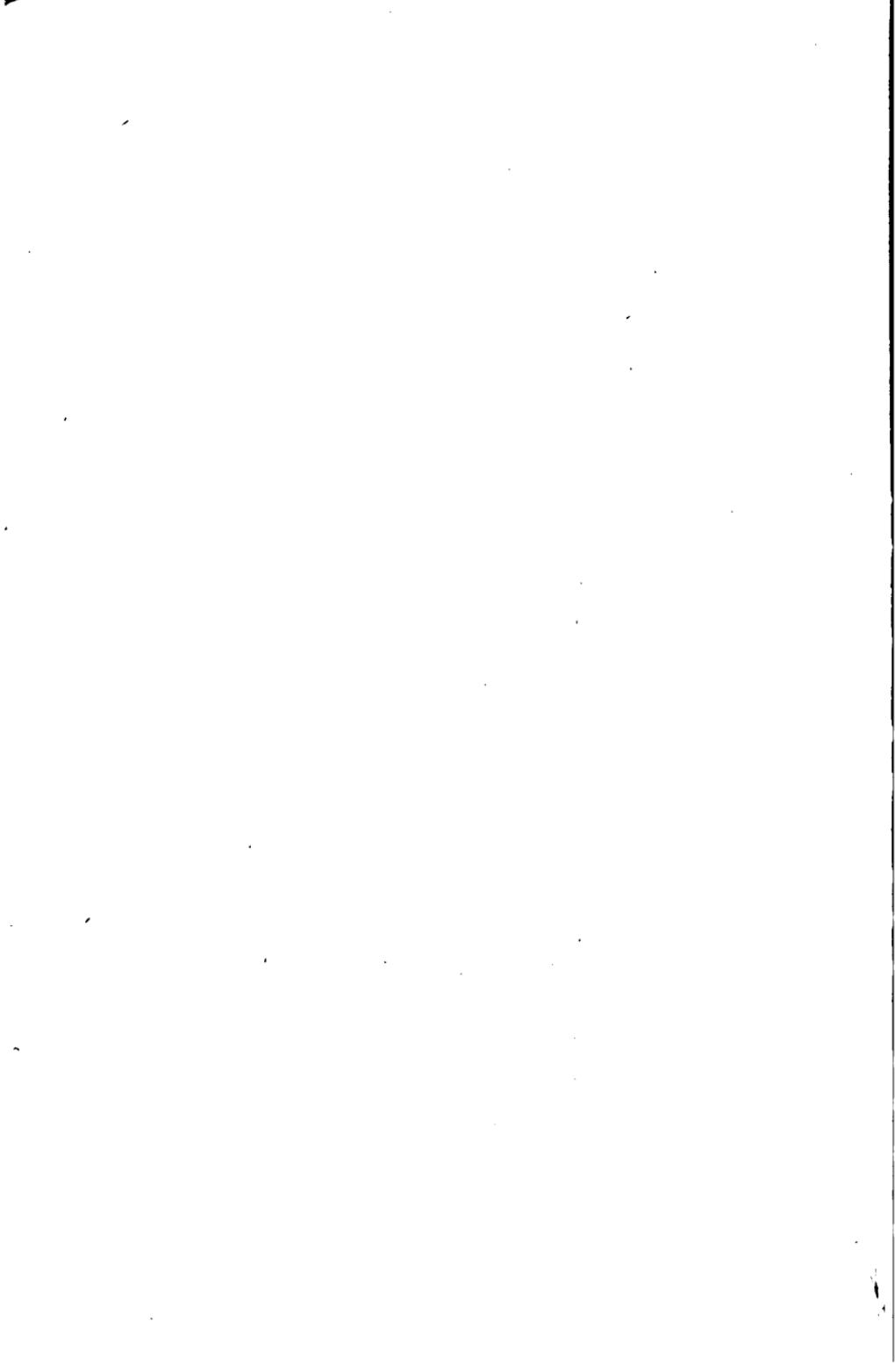
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## INTRODUCTION

To the great mass of the American public Arthur Schnitzler, admittedly the finest psychologist in the theatre today, is still as it were something of a far half-rumored country upon whose bourne the proverbial tired pedestrian seldom touches. As a people, whether intensively or extensively, we haven't as yet cultivated the habit of turning up the lamp after coffee and liqueurs for the purpose of abandoning ourselves without reserve to a refined spirit, a subtle mind reaching out with infinite circumspectness and tact. Tact has its peculiar morality in the same way that art has its implied ethics. This tact when applied to the province of thought may simply mean that the world is not an affair of sharp lines, rules or data. It is this quality emanating from just such a spirit and mind that we find uppermost in Arthur Schnitzler.

In Europe Schnitzler's dramatic pieces are ranked on a par with those of his German confrères, Hauptmann and Wedekind. The keenly discerning Berlin and Munich audiences, not wholly free from an acute national consciousness, concede him a place immediately after these two in their affections. But in view of the fact that Schnitzler is uniquely abreast, if not a few hurdles ahead, of his time in handling that vein of character analysis which utilizes most effectively the latest discover-

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ies of psychic and psychological research, it is not at all improbable that the ultimate tribunal of playgoers will insphere him higher than either Hauptmann or Wedekind. As long as men and women will continue to be intrigued by the elusive enigma of life, by subtle states of the soul, by problems of the subliminal self, so long, we may venture to predict, will the plays of Arthur Schnitzler compel attention from the truly great audiences of the world which, as Whitman realized, are the indispensable abettors of progress in every art.

Arthur Schnitzler was born in 1862. His father, Johann Schnitzler, was a famous laryngologist. Following in his father's footsteps or rather compelled to follow, he studied medicine and obtained his degree from the University of Vienna in 1885. He was appointed assistant physician at the Clinical Hospital, one of the largest of its kind, in 1889. Meanwhile he was acting as contributing editor to his father's medical review *Wiener Klinische Rundschau*. At this period we notice that he also contributed poems, stories and sketches to other publications. He seems to have applied himself whole-heartedly to investigations in psychic phenomena, for he published an article about this time on the treatment of certain diseases by hypnotism and suggestion. Then followed a trip to London, not altogether for pleasure, for it bore fruit in the shape of a series of "London Letters" contributed to his father's review and exclusively devoted to medical subjects of wide range and variety. His original writings and collaborations on these subjects, together with his

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occasional excursions into fascinating byways of medicine, are too numerous to mention here. Suffice it that they culminated in an exhaustive reference work compiled in association with the elder Schnitzler, entitled "Clinical Atlas of Laryngology and Rhinology." From that time until this, despite his beckoning interests and undoubted genius and recognition in creative literature, he has maintained his intimate connection with the Clinical Hospital and still, as if they constituted a labor of first love, unremittingly attends to his private activities as a general practitioner.

Schnitzler's first play "Anatol," a cycle of dialogues written around a central character appearing in each, was probably finished in 1889; it was produced in 1892. The success of "Anatol" was immediate. Its wit and its shrewd grasp of human nature captured Vienna like a storm. Up to the time of this writing he has written and produced about twenty five plays; his last, big play, "Professor Bernhardi" (1912), having started a wild sensation, crimination and recrimination, throughout the whole of Austria and Germany; while, on the other hand, his marvellous activity both as a novelist and short story writer has prompted criticism, outside of Austria and Germany, to deliberately couple his name with the names of Zola, Dostoievsky and de Maupassant.

The fact that in private life Schnitzler is a practising physician says much. It is significant and infinitely suggestive along the path of a sound appreciation and appraisal of the man. It is the key, without doubt, to a proper and final under-

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standing of his work in that it helps to throw light on his tenderness and on that peculiar incisive dissection of human yearnings and the daily stock of human foibles standing out on every page of his novels, tales and plays; in short, those poignant diagnoses of the soul, instinct rather than patent in everything he has set his hand to, which are as inexorable as they are expert. This fact, as I have indicated, provides the touchstone to his writings which, quite possibly, we would otherwise miss. But it scarcely satisfies, I need hardly say — perhaps only serves to fan all the more — the idle though wholly pardonable curiosity of those prying critics who are avid to know how the physician manages to filch time out of his practise to give to what must, after all, be the more absorbing career: how, in a word, he has succeeded in crowding-in the long roll of his superb plays.

As a writer, whether in the realm of the novel or the theatre, Schnitzler hardly ever repudiates his origin and source; for he is first and foremost the child of Vienna — Viennese of the Viennese. Though this explains a good deal it does not, on the other hand, suggest the whole full-statured man. Inevitably the atmosphere and life of the gay Austrian capital, surcharged with haunting tenderness and almost insolent indifference, have lent their tone and invested his work, from beginning to end, with a racy resilience peculiar to the city; but certainly it cannot be urged that he is indebted to it for that larger vision and scope which transcend all local boundaries and reach up

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to eternity. That is inalienably his own; that is from the gods.

If, as in a sore crisis of misgiving, Grillparzer, Vienna's noblest poet, is reputed to have said, "They are a Phæacian folk," then it is more than evident that Schnitzler is no sort of Ulysses cast up by wind and tide on the shore of the "Blue Danube" to play ducks and drakes with their sunny, smiling placidity. No man is altogether free of his social and artistic environment. And Schnitzler, like the rest, is no disconcerting exception to this well-worn commonplace. As Elizabethan London was directly responsible for and gave birth to Shakespeare, so modern Vienna in a sense anticipated and produced Arthur Schnitzler. London had its Mermaid Tavern and there is in Vienna a restaurant where the young Viennese spirits of twenty years or so ago, Bahr, Schnitzler and von Hoffmannsthal used to foregather and thresh out their theories of art and life. Dostoievsky, with his immortal pity and self-abnegation; Zola with his biologic naturalism; de Maupassant, Ibsen and Oscar Wilde held them enthralled. The naturalism which they absorbed from these writers they attempted to apply to the life about them. Bahr became interested in social problems of the day, von Hoffmannsthal in a new and more close interpretation of nature, in a new beauty of language, and Schnitzler in the everlasting problem of the soul.

Hauptmann is of the North, and you will find woven deep in the fibre of his creations the uncouth cry and ruggedness of the North. Pro-

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fessor Ludwig Lewisohn, Hauptmann's translator, has recently said of the latter's men and women that they are "impelled by hunger, by lust, by the primitive will to power, by aspiration. They have little eloquence of speech or grace or gesture, but move as by our own woes which are also the unconquerable woes of the world. The disharmonies between themselves and the universe are tragic and final. Humble souls though they are, they perish of elemental needs and are crucified in great causes. They are not beautiful, they are not wise, they are not pure; they are only broken and imperfect members of the family of man." Schnitzler on the other hand is of the South, and accordingly he is permeated through and through with the frail warmth, the insouciant grace and sappy charm—phrases that come glibly and naturally to the lips, like a byword, whenever one is speaking of Vienna. These qualities, so apparent in Schnitzler, are of course winning in themselves, but in him they are further shot through with a vein of piquant intrigue which is, for the most part, Gallic in texture and tradition—more Gallic, I am almost tempted to say, than that which operates in Paris itself.

There is a cross-section of Austrian society and politics which offers an inviting target to the weapons of the alert, timely satirist; and Schnitzler, like Shaw, has not been reticent in this respect. Both in his novels and plays he has at various times attacked socialism, monarchism, the aristocracy, semitism and anti-semitism, the latter being a question which is always more or less of an open sore in Vienna. In "The Road to the

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Open," a novel, he treats at considerable length but, true to the tradition of the satirist, with mordant disinterestedness (though this is not the main theme of the book) this question in its several phases and shows the ridiculous types it breeds on both sides. In "Lieutenant Gustl," another novel, he remorselessly hacks to pieces the out-worn sentimental code of honor prevalent in Europe. In "Professor Bernhardi," his great womanless play (there is but one female character and she is minor), he touches on the problem of free conscience, the right to act as you think no matter what those about you believe — the same problem, in fact, which was treated by Ibsen in "An Enemy of the People"— to which play indeed it bears a strong resemblance, and more recently, by Galsworthy in "The Mob."

Unlike Hauptmann who, it might be said, resembles him only in the point which is their mutual departure, Schnitzler is above all a consummate master of the theatre. He writes primarily for the stage, that is, not for any experimental or local stage, but for the stage of the world. Perhaps for the potential stage of the world, whose advent, in company with Brieux and Tchekov and Shaw, he is helping to bring about. And yet, paradoxical as it may appear to us who are accustomed to the ephemeral flummery of Broadway, he has carved his way to an indubitable niche among the great German stylists thronged above time. In delicacy, in finesse, in that manner of tact which is the essence of good style, he far surpasses his North German contemporary. This gift alone would be but a dubious advantage,

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were it not for the force and ecstasy beneath the surface vesture. Schnitzler's breadth is well illustrated by the fact that fused in his work are such antinomous elements as savoury wit and mysticism — the mysticism of Maeterlinck and Ruysbroeck, and this mysticism is mingled with the irony, the prose-lyricism of Heinrich Heine. But outstripping these qualities, or a part of them, is a sure sense of the dramatic, of the most desirable aspects of the theatre as it is.

Schnitzler's unforgivingly satirical side presents only one expression of a deep and deliberate outlook on life. Nowadays in discussing the passing drama of the boards we are apt to lose sight of this fact; so few writers for the stage have anything to say, or do not say it. The printed drama has of course received its fair meed of literary comment. Schnitzler, I wish to emphasize, writes for the stage and he has something to say.

Precisely what his outlook on life is and by what processes it has been arrived at, cannot be here summarily stated, even supposing all the biographical minutiae at our disposal. We may dismiss it, if we please, by the all-inclusive generalization (at best all generalizations are a form of hedging) that every significant dramatist from Sophocles to Tchekov and Dunsany has, in some measure, possessed it. Sophocles, for example gave utterance to it in "Œdipus Rex" and the "Antigone," Shakespeare most overwhelmingly in "Hamlet" and in "Macbeth"; Calderon in "Life is a Dream." If you are one of those who already read and care for Schnitzler at all,

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it will hardly be a piece of startling news to you when I assert that something of the magic and the breadth and the truth which attaches to these great names attaches also to him at his highest.

Man, Schnitzler seems to imply, and does actually declare through his living characters and the huge crises which grip them, is an out-and-out egoist and life an iridescent illusion. To delve down to fundamentals at once, man is always tinkering, by thought and act, to establish the earth and his busy little existence, with its trivial joys and irrelevant subjective tumults, as the central pivot of all life in the same way that Dante naïvely seized on Jerusalem, a religious and therefore a subjective ideal, as the very heart of the universe. It may be that Dante was intuitively right and nothing matters in the last analysis but what we feel and think. Samuel Butler, crabbed saint and celibate, pointed out to a deaf generation too taken up with Huxley to give ear, how difficult it is to cleave thought from language, and it is an axiom among thinkers in general that it is quite hopeless to comprehend the universe outside of man's finite consciousness. Schnitzler accepts this hypothesis or *cul-de-sac*, whichever you choose to call it, and the whole substance of his reaction is that, no matter how diligently a man may labor to penetrate to the essential core of things, illusion, or what goes by the name of illusion with us, will always confusingly blend with reality in our consciousness and vice versa. We have, after all, but five shallow senses: we come into this life armed as it were

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with but five shallow and desperately inadequate dictaphones to dangle out blindly into space among the stars in order that we might — with how much thought-teasing! — “gather in a small part of the infinite influences that vibrate in nature.” In illustration of this sensitive reaction, take the following lines which are not quoted from Calderon or Shakespeare, but from “Paracelsus,” Schnitzler’s one act play in verse:

“Our life is wrought of dreams and waking, fused  
Of truth and lies. There lives no certitude.  
Of others we know naught, naught of ourselves,  
We play a part and wise is he who knows it.”

Very sketchily then, this is the background of Schnitzler’s art; on the thought that illusion and reality are interchangeable terms for man Schnitzler has erected four-square the fascinating edifice of his plays. It constitutes a viewpoint — a quickened viewpoint, despite its limitations as a regular work-a-day diet. And the dramatist whose appeal is to surmount the merely local, whose work is to persist beyond the passing moment, must give proof of such a viewpoint which pithily and suggestively comprises what he thinks about life. It is a pledge in a sense that he has indeed lived, or that he has overtaken life and is therefore eligible to the office of holding up the priceless mirror. The Germans, as a nation of critics, have always more or less known the true value of the word “viewpoint” *Weltanschauung*, and to them it signifies chiefly the acid test, cruel in rejection, by which they challenge every claim to greatness in art. This should not

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be construed into meaning that the writer or the artist must consciously start out on a kind of Arthurian quest in order to achieve it. Rarely, if ever, is it achieved that way. Whether he is born with it or merely reaps it upon the glebe of experience sown with blood and suffering, ultimately matters but little. The fact is that the artist must have it; it is the secret and enigma of genius; and the fact of his having it singles him out at once from the vast common litter of lesser men.

Though starting from a vastly diverse experience, Schnitzler has come to look on nature with dim shadowy eyes, not unlike those of Joseph Conrad. I do not wish to press the comparison unduly. If you will put the portrait of Conrad alongside the portrait of Schnitzler and allow sufficiently for obvious racial chiselling which marks certain differences, the emotional depths, the temperamental force common to both men, will immediately become evident to you. You might say, referring to the former's work, that he has been rarely known to smile while the latter, slightly more sophisticated, is always wearing a creased smile about his lips that is also in the nature of a gird. In the view of both, however, there is a destiny which fashions us to alien ends. There is a greater similarity than a superficial consideration affords between the characters of Lord Jim and Young Medardus, between Heyst and Young Medardus. For both the Pole and the Austrian, at all events, men and women are hardly more than the dead ashes of withered dreams swept helter-skelter by the imperious ty-

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phoons of chance: and if it should befall that one, bolder than the rest, endeavors to orient whither he is drifting beyond Time and Space, he is immediately thrust back by blowing winds, and all that is vouchsafed him at the end of the quest is the clang of mighty doors. This is not a fable by Schnitzler, but it might be. You might, for instance, die like Lord Jim, having fulfilled your destiny without suspecting it; or you might be one of those luckless ones for whom despair and delirium, like snarling cerberi, lie in wait. This latter viewpoint is searchingly symbolised in Schnitzler's tale called "The Threefold Admonishment."

Schnitzler's plays, the least equally with the greatest, grow logically out of this conception. Criticism proceeds inductively. Schnitzler has written the plays and the critic, seeking the essence of the man, saddles him with a conception of life. Other interpretations, I have no doubt, are possible. When you are dealing with a big man like Schnitzler, it is simply fatuous to attempt to pigeon-hole him. Whatever else Schnitzler may do, certainly, it must be admitted, he sounds the strident note of irony, the helpless mistaking of illusion for reality, reality for illusion. It would, I think, require more than a mere journeyman's task to find in all literature a more striking, a more ingenious illustration of the viewpoint cited above than is to be found in the one act play "The Green Cockatoo."

All of Schnitzler's plays of tragic import, in accordance with this viewpoint, have their satirical and comic side and running right through his

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comedies there is an immanent vein of tragedy. For Schnitzler the universe, taken all in all, is tragic. The reason is simple. If a man writes comedy with a tragic hand, or weaves a deeper philosophy behind the play of wit, there is no telling how much he has thought about and through the life he is portraying; his thought has probably risen to the pitch of the universal and that, if it means anything, means, in the case of a dramatist, that he is a pessimist.

And yet in Schnitzler's plays the tragic element is kept perennially delicate and discreet. Our author tolerates no tearing of a passion to tatters, no truculent mouthing and so he has fashioned, in answer to his mood, well-bred people who consider it decidedly below them to fly passionately in the face of Destiny. "Abandon ye all vehemence who enter here" he seems to caution his *dramatis personæ* previous to their entrance upon the three hours' traffic of the stage. Still, you cannot urge that they are not intensely real people who act and speak in a very real way: certainly they are insouciant and casuistical about this and that; certainly they punctuate their languid utterances with little specious lies and tinsel half-truths about themselves and life in general; but they are real and large as life itself. As Hugo von Hoffmannsthal, speaking of them, has said: "They are like artists and writers who have gathered of an evening in front of the fireplace of one of their confrères. The furnishings are elegant and commodious and the lamp is turned down. They have quite forgotten the corrosive ironies of the day. Lounging at

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their ease, they nonchalantly exchange anecdotes and develop paradoxes." And it must be admitted that the characters in Schnitzler's plays, except in a few notable exceptions, do luxuriate in analysing uncommon states of the soul while they appear to be watching the vanishing smoke of their cigarettes. But this is inevitable; this is the Viennese heritage. Seeking to dissect, as I have said, every fine shade of their feelings, they drift from one illusion to another and, thrusting to pierce behind the material garment of things, they hurl their feeble ratiocinative "Cui Bono?" toward the showman behind the wings. "A bower," von Hoffmannsthal says further, "takes the place of a scene and sunshine puts out the foot-lights. Thus we stage-manage our plays. Mature spirits, matured early in life, delicate and melancholy, we produce the comedy of our own souls, the changing life of the heart, glittering phrases for vile things, flattering causerie, multi-colored images, sentiments only half-born, episodes, agonies —"

In the province of the commercially disdained one act play, the darling of the mushroom little theatres, there can be no question that Schnitzler is today supreme. Since the death of Strindberg, with whom as a psychologist he might be profitably contrasted and John Millington Synge, whose classic aloofness it is quite futile to expect him to approximate, there has risen no figure comparable to him in this long neglected art-form of the theatre.

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The one act play, as we are familiar with it, may be said to undertake a suddenly glimpsed slice of life, a cross-section packed with emotional potentiality, a climactic and fateful episode in the life of a person or group of persons. This episode, skillfully selected by the playwright, reveals the causal past wherein the episode has fastened its roots and foreshadows something of the future coming directly out of the events en scène. The one act play does not of necessity attain a satisfying emotional cadenza at the fall of the curtain, like a phrase of music: the interest and suspense of the audience is entrapped primarily by what takes place on the stage, and only secondarily and incidentally, by the train of events which we conjecture is bound to follow. This does not, of course, predispose against the immediate action's serving as a dramatic springboard for the imaginative guess of the audience. In point of fact, a clever handling of this element of foreshadowing will heighten considerably the dramatic effect. An audience likes to feel, so to speak, that it has its hand upon the author's mind, whereas it is the playwright who is controlling and steering at will the mind of the audience. Schnitzler's one act plays fulfill all the requirements of their kind with a compressed art that is little short of perfection.

The plays grouped under the title of "Comedy of Words," here presented to the American reader for the first time, were published in 1915 and represent the most recent product from Schnitzler's pen and though, as we think, they will scarcely enhance his reputation to any great ex-

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tent, they do, nevertheless, continue in the tradition of his best work. In the subsoil of "The Green Cockatoo," 1898, "Anatol," 1893, "Stragglers at the Carnival," 1901; in "Literature," 1901, and "His Helpmate," 1898 (the latter two are included in the present volume), and in the "Comedy of Words" comprising "The Hour of Recognition," "The Big Scene" and "The Festival of Bacchus," lurk the germs of his larger, more discursive plays. The firm grasp of character delineation exhibited in these one act plays is always trenchant, the wit and satire sparkling and, upon the whole, they are more closely and tightly knit, more reticent than his full-sized plays. In actual performance what this artistic reticence implies usually escapes all but the most finished actors. And it is precisely for this reason, rather than because, say, the producers lacked the necessary insight and penetrating sympathy, that the performance of "Literature" at the Bandbox by the Washington Square Players of New York resulted in high treason to art, in sacrilege and absurd fiasco. Managers, as a rule, scout the idea of producing Schnitzler's longer plays because of what appears to them as a lapse of architectonics, an absence of prescribed play structure, an effect of diffuseness and unconnected thought. But juxtaposed to a play by any of the best known naturalists, say, Hauptmann or Tolstoi or Tchekov, it will immediately be seen that Schnitzler, besides being an artist with a sweeping ecstatic vision, is also an artificer of the first water. His artistic self-consciousness, however, has succeeded admirably in obliterating itself and

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has become, by an act of highest genius, transfigured into unconscious and naïve beauty.

Whatever appreciation of Schnitzler exists on this side of the Atlantic is due mainly to the fine clear-cut paraphrase of the dialogues of "Anatol" by Mr. Granville Barker. Several years ago the Anatol cycle was produced in New York with Mr. John Barrymore in the title rôle. The performance was finished and, as I recall it, left little to be desired from many points of view; but a typical New York audience, slightly elevated, it may be, above the usual level of Broadway, buttoned up after the performance the vague, self-satisfied and fatuous impression that Arthur Schnitzler, in his own intimate *cenâcle*, must be a rather wicked person — witty and charming and adorable, owning something of the suavity and zest of a roué who inhabits brilliantly one of Oscar Wilde's drawing-room scenes. Needless to say, Anatol, irresistible though he himself is, armored in his panoply of eternal self-suspicion and self-philosophy, confesses only an infinitesimal part of his creator, of the artist-to-be and his subsequent maturity born of a stupendous power that is at once overbearing and sheer: his wit, his rare humor, his almost uncanny knowledge of the all-too-human, his poetry, his travailing depth (in the sense that all philosophy is an agonized travailing). Schnitzler was twenty seven when he wrote "Anatol." Since the conception of that immensely engaging spoiled child of almost every metropolis in the world, he has pushed on-to profounder regions of thought and psychological analysis.

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The character of Anatol, about whom the cycle revolves, is worth dwelling on for the reason that it is the archetype of other studies appearing later in various re-pencilled avatars throughout the longer plays. Anatol is an exquisite belonging to the modern *jeunesse doré* with a good smack of the self-psychologist in his make-up. As a physician of the feminine soul, a purveyor to the feminine heart, an amateur in the art of love, he runs pretty thoroughly the gamut of Viennese society. He starts with the *süsses Mädl* whose habit is to vibrate between the virtuous-seeming domesticity and the gay abandon of the Prater. He ends—or to be exact—he never ends with the faithless wife. The old love, no matter how poignant and heart-wrenching at one time, is always bartered for the new. With exemplary ironic finesse, his friend and confidant, Max, thimblerigs him out of the mesh of many a desperate situation, many a sinister dilemma, many a dying amourette. Max, you see, is the brutal opposite of the butterfly Anatol. He is safe and probably arrives at his office in the city no later than ten in the morning; he treads ever the sane and sure path of eternal skepticism as regards women. Neither moral nor immoral but just master of himself, he denies to the weaker sex the usual benefit of the doubt. You cannot prove, Max might say, that they are faithful even if they protest with tears and smelling salts on your shoulder; nor can you argue that they have brains even though they may bewilder you with intricate and high-sounding talk. Anatol, on the other hand, is being continually and mercilessly

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racked by what are in reality delicious misgivings, alternately believing and doubting. Max, you might say offhand, is a practical, level-headed fellow and Anatol — a Toy Philosopher. Now a Toy Philosopher may be described, without the aid of a specimen of his dialectic, as a callow theorist syllogizing about the world in general and about women in particular; one who toys with both, if you like, by way of experiment. As an inevitable consequence of his dilly-dallying with life and love, it is not to be wondered at that his hypotheses, as well as his conclusions, should prove amazingly absurd and befuddling. But the one unchangeable condition of these conclusions of Anatol's is that they are at any moment subject to change. Who would dare to be absolute when it is a question of so variable a quantity as women?

In the somewhat stolid person of Max, the eternally sound-minded, Anatol, as it were, finds a spar while floundering in the tub of his Toy Philosophy. Max is indeed hard put to it in his tireless exploits to temper the emotional ineptitude of his flittering friend. Women — mystery? Pshaw! If women had the brains to think about men, how great a mystery then would men be to women? But Anatol, stone-deaf to reason however wise and insistent, suffers one disillusionment after another and not only by virtue of his conquests (for a conquest is as good as a disillusionment), but also and overwhelmingly because of the sorry show he makes of himself while about it. Anatol emerges from the tangle of his experiences unchanged, unlessoned — the same! We need seek no further. The keynote to Ana-

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tol's character, I believe, is to be found right here: he is one of those unresting persons, hopelessly temperamental, who lacks above all things the knack of turning the gleanings of his experience into the grist of simple wisdom. Secretly, on the unwritten principle, no doubt, that all the world loves a charming rogue, we wish him all kinds of luck; but even so, we cannot help feeling that he will, when all is said and done, learn very little more of that self-created and intriguing paradox: the genus Woman. To him, as to all those of his introspective clan, we may justly apply the aphorism of Francis Thompson: "Suspicion creates its own cause; distrust begets reason for distrust."

Anatol, as I have previously intimated, is from the artistic as well as the chronological side, the point of departure for Schnitzler's work. The immortal irony inherent in his mature, fully developed style, and commented on so widely, is here exquisitely foreshadowed and foretold. If this irony is not exactly corrosive in the dialogues, still, such as it is, it testifies to a quality in the author which is characteristic of the great wielders of satire, from Cervantes to Anatole France — that quality, I mean, of being able to laugh at one's own cherished beliefs, even at oneself. There is, moreover, a delightful piquancy about the cycle which, I suspect, is responsible for the enormous vogue "*Anatol*" has received. But undoubtedly the highest expression of Schnitzler's genius as a craftsman in the realm of the one act play will be found in the plays contained in the present volume and in the earlier pieces, "*Stragglers at the Carr-*

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nival" (1901), and "The Green Cockatoo," published in 1898.

In "The Green Cockatoo" the ironic touch of Schnitzler is most remarkably portrayed. For sheer subtlety and evasive deftness of handling, for artistry or artifice as well as art — the art, I mean, which perfectly coalesces theme and framework, "The Green Cockatoo" is in its way unsurpassable in the history of the drama. Call it flawless technique, if you are so minded. But the term technique, so simple and nude to the bench-warmer of drama courses, is altogether inconclusive in the present application and calls for a much broader and more spiritual re-definition. I shall not attempt to define it here. Suffice it to say, that it partakes of the qualities of ecstasy and suprasensual clairvoyance and is not to be achieved with the aid of Broadway scissors and pastepot, nor by diligently studying the literal diagrams of the schools. In a word, it is the very quintessence of genius. Where there is high portentous matter (and there can be no high portentous matter unless there is also personality), wherever this matter is organically welded with form that is consummately fitting, technique, so called, will automatically take care of itself. In "The Green Cockatoo," as in "The Hour of Recognition" and "The Festival of Bacchus" artifice vanishes before power.

"The Big Scene" is little more than a character etching, admirable though it be, and "Literature" is an exalted farce whose humor makes Laughter hold both his sides; "His Helpmate" is a quiet but keen study in disillusionment and "Stragglers

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at the Carnival " contains shattering elements of tragic contrast: false hope flickering up in the vaulted night of the soul, unconsciously grim humor and finally unutterable world-weariness and despair, the like of which, if we would find it, we must seek in " Hamlet " and the concluding scenes of " Macbeth." If Schnitzler were simply a satirist, like Anatole France, then " The Green Cockatoo " would emerge as the ironic chef d'œuvre of a pastmaster of the weapons and instruments of irony. But since he is infinitely more than a satirist, he has given us plays like " His Helpmate," " Stragglers at the Carnival," " The Hour of Recognition " and " The Festival of Bacchus," which surpass it in emotional intensity, in psychological interaction, in the portrayal of the clash of fundamental human consciousness, or, which is perhaps nearer the truth, subconsciousness with subconsciousness; these plays are of a different mould. But as a dish relished with the sauce of wit and the curry of biting satire " The Green Cockatoo " has been unequalled of its kind. In this play the author has used ingeniously, I had almost said greatly, the device of a play within a play. It is, however, when closely examined, no idle device intended merely to amuse or flip the jaded theatrical sense, for it voices by artistic implication the whole trend of Schnitzler's reaction to life:

" We play a part and wise is he who knows it."

The five plays contained in the present volume will undoubtedly commend themselves to those who care for the best in modern drama. The

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American playwright will find it profitable to study them as models of character drawing, of dialogue, of the broad vision that forgets mediocrity. In their way, since Schnitzler is a pioneer in psychology, they are Baedekers to human nature. The discerning reader, already familiar with Schnitzler's work, will observe how much deeper he has penetrated and will enjoy these new adventures in the human soul. His debt to Freud, in this respect, is already too well known to dwell on. In passing, however, permit me to mention that in his "Arthur Schnitzler als Psycholog" Dr. Theodor Reik, a disciple of Freud, has attempted to gauge and appraise this debt. He has taken the plays, premised the situations as real, and then psycho-analysed the characters in the manner of the Austrian neurologist. Again in these one act plays the reader will find an artistic voicing of the philosophical point of view that reality, the familiar of the senses, grades indiscernibly into illusion and vice versa. Suppose we put it another way: In the cut and thrust of ordinary life, in the thronging press of experience and sensation, action and thought and memory — faculties by whose testimony we think we know the world about us and are, moreover, convinced that we are alive — it is practically impossible to sever what we think from what is. Life then is a dream-lit maze or only such stuff as dreams are made on. Sleep comes but at the end, for even in dreams the process of life and thought is going on. But even in the innermost region inhabited only by our dreams reside and float fragmentary

## **INTRODUCTION**

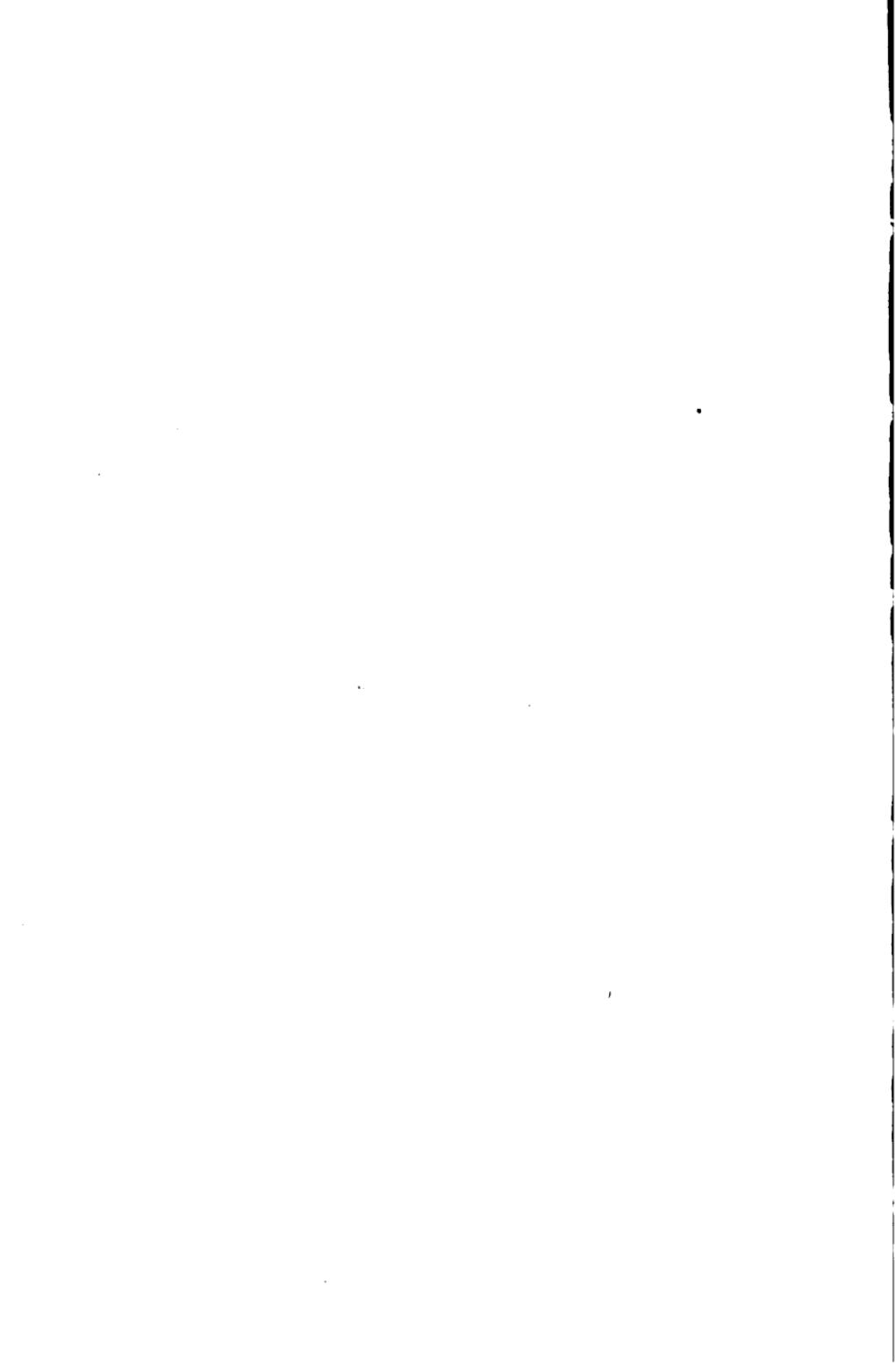
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drifts of reality, rumors of the waking world, dim and undefined. And this, concisely put, is the dominant theme hovering like an overtone above the scenes, tragic and rare and entralling, of all of Schnitzler's work.

**PIERRE LOVING.**

New York City, November, 1916.

## **COMEDIES OF WORDS**



# THE HOUR OF RECOGNITION

## A COMEDY OF WORDS

### PERSONS

CARL ECKOLD, M.D.

CLARA, *his wife.*

PROFESSOR RUDOLPH ORMIN.

MAID }  
SERVINGMAN } *at the Eckolds.*

[SCENE: *Dining room in the home of Dr. Eckold, Vienna. A door in the rear conducts to an ante-room or vestibule; another pierced in the right wall opens to the waiting-room, still another on the left leads to the other living rooms. The furniture is comfortable but old-fashioned.*

*Discovered, Dr. Carl Eckold, a man of, say 45, with a dark brown square-cut beard, inclining to baldness. He wears a pince-nez for reading purposes. Also, Clara, his wife, 40, still pretty. Both are seated at the table finishing their dessert.*

*The servingman comes in with a card.]*

SERVINGMAN. The lady begs to be admitted at once, if possible.

ECKOLD [*deliberately turning the card between his fingers*]. My hours, as announced, start at

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three. It is scarcely half past two now. Ask the lady to be patient. Anybody else waiting?

SERVINGMAN. Three patients already, sir.

ECKOLD. H'm! I shall take them in the order of their arrival.

[*Servingman goes off. The maid serves the coffee, which Clara pours into the cups.*]

ECKOLD. Why, you've laid three covers, Clara. Have you forgotten that our Miss Bettina, or, to do her nibs justice, Mrs. Bettina Wermann, dines in Salzburg today? Perhaps in Zurich? Perhaps — Heaven only knows where?

CLARA. No. I haven't forgotten, Carl. The extra cover was laid for Ormin.

ECKOLD. Ah, yes. Made his apologies over the telephone, has he?

CLARA. No, nothing definite. Besides, I know he is coming to bid us good-bye.

ECKOLD. Terribly busy, I suppose, with this long journey in front of him. Will you call me when he comes? I want to pay my respects in person. [*Rises, striding over to the right, turning half-way.*] Are you going out?

CLARA. No, I've nothing particular on for tonight. Why do you ask? Anything you wish to consult me about?

ECKOLD. Nothing out of the ordinary. There's no hurry at all. Well — [*glances at the clock, making for the door, right. The serving-man enters with telegram and newspaper. Eckold steps toward him, taking the telegram. The servingman places the newspaper on the table.*]

ECKOLD [*opening the telegram*]. From Bettina.

## THE HOUR OF RECOGNITION

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CLARA [*going up to him, eagerly.*] Oh, already?

ECKOLD. From Bettina and Hugo, of course.  
[*Clara reads over his shoulder.*]

ECKOLD. From Innsbruck.

CLARA. They didn't squander a round minute. Piled into a cab directly after the wedding supper and whipped to the station.

ECKOLD. Quite a sensible idea, that!

CLARA [*reading*]. "Tomorrow Zurich. Day after tomorrow we expect to have a word from you at Luzerne, Palace Hotel."

ECKOLD. "A thousand regards."

CLARA. The identical route we travelled twenty-two years ago. Only we weren't so hot-foot to reach Innsbruck.

ECKOLD [*without twitching a muscle of his face*]. Modern tempo, I guess. And we didn't stop at the Palace Hotel, either.

CLARA. It wasn't up then.

ECKOLD. Even if it had been —

CLARA. It was glorious, all the same — without the Palace, I mean.

ECKOLD. Ah, but Bettina's struck better luck than you.

CLARA. Now — [*touching his arm gently.*]

ECKOLD [*moving away from her. Alongside the table, nonchalantly fluttering the newspaper.*] I don't reproach myself in any way when I affirm that. A paternal million, let me tell you, isn't to be ground down with the heel of one's foot. Especially when the stars fight in their courses for you, which really is the case with your son-in-law. [*Glancing at the newspaper.*] Here's something

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about Ormin, by the way [*reading*] "The regular sanitation corps under the leadership of Rudolph Ormin, Royal and Imperial Professor, of the Austrian Red Cross, will leave Vienna this evening on the eight twenty express. At Trieste it will board the Austrian Lloyd liner *Amphitrite*, sailing for Japan, and thence will repair to the war zone." [*He holds out the newspaper to her, scrutinizing her face closely as she peruses the column.*] Not bad at all, that. [Sits.]

CLARA [*still standing*]. You ploughed through something of the sort once.

ECKOLD. Bosnia —? There's no comparison — really.

CLARA. But it was a kind of war, wasn't it?

ECKOLD. Kind of? Not merely a "kind of," but a bona fide war, I assure you. You might have gathered that from my diary. I let you read it then. Surely you remember?

CLARA [*laughing*]. Certainly, I remember.

ECKOLD. From the steep mountain slopes they fired on us where we were huddled below. Little heed they gave to the Red Cross. Sanitation corps or no, be damned to you! [*Changing his tone.*] Ah, but it's jolly good going through it with the brevet of a superior — like Ormin, for instance! At the time I was only a callow surgeon. I had just taken my degree. Nowadays I am utterly unqualified for such an undertaking. It calls for more elasticity in a man, more idealism, in a certain sense, more youth.

CLARA. Ormin is two years older than you.

## THE HOUR OF RECOGNITION

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And, moreover, it's rumored his heart's not perfectly fit.

ECKOLD. But it's not a question of years, not even of health. What keeps one in good fettle is success, recognition, fame.

CLARA. Perhaps if you had adopted an academic career —

ECKOLD. Oh, of course. The difference in the nature of our endowments, Ormin's and mine, isn't so big that you can notice it. It was due to other things. Of that I am sure. Over and above all things else, Ormin possesses innate gaiety of spirit. There's the rub. The spiritual urge, as it were. Then you've got to give the man credit for some superficiality. That's an attribute you must be born with. It's not to be acquired, no matter how hard you try.

CLARA. Somehow he never needed to drum up a practice.

ECKOLD. Neither did I. Years ago, when he and I were young physicians, financially he was no better off than I. No better off than I. What's the good of paltering with the truth. Like mine in all respects, his lot was one of woe and struggle.

CLARA. Yes, but for himself alone.

ECKOLD. Of course, when he married his anxieties were increased. What do you expect? A good deal has to be discounted — always. Were he to die one of these days Mrs. Melanie would not be so wonderfully provided for.

CLARA. Since she's not legally divorced, she gets her allowance just the same.

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ECKOLD. Allowance! About two thousand crowns. And that, as you know, doesn't go a great way with dear Melanie. She used to spend as much as that on gloves and hats alone. At least that was —

CLARA. Really, I think she was maligned more than she deserved. Society is horribly stony-hearted towards the wives of great men.

ECKOLD. Great? Pshaw. You mean, famous. Well, thank Heaven, you're spared such treatment. Now—[*is about to go when Professor Ormin comes in. He is a clean-shaven man of about 50, with a haggard, sharply-chiselled face.*]

ORMIN. How d'ye do. I trust sincerely you haven't waited until now with the dinner. [Kisses the tips of Clara's fingers and shakes hands with Eckold.]

ORMIN. I've dined already, thank you.

CLARA. You must take a cup of coffee —

ORMIN. Thanks. Don't let me put you out, though. [*Clara rings and gives an order to the maid who has entered.*]

ECKOLD. Delighted to see you once again before you leave. This evening, eh? And then on the *Amphitrite*?

ORMIN. Yes.

ECKOLD. Here 'tis in the paper. Ah, but you're going to have a fine passage. In June — by the by, when do you expect to be at the front — on duty, I mean.

ORMIN. In four weeks. But I think it'll take us considerably longer to get to the actual war zone.

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ECKOLD. Who knows, old man, but all may be settled before you arrive.

ORMIN. Settled? Why, it's scarcely begun. And judging from all appearances, things will be rather long drawn out. [The maid brings the coffee and Clara pours it into the cup. The maid goes out.]

ECKOLD. Are you taking an assistant along?

ORMIN. Yes, Marenzeller. Kleinert's picked to take my place in the clinic. [Sipping his coffee.] Do you know who's sailing with us? Guess. On the *Amphitrite*, too. Our good old friend, Floding.

ECKOLD. Floding? I suppose he's aged a good deal. Grown virtuous, has he? Not likely, I guess. Virtue as a rule is more elusive than age.

CLARA. In what capacity is Floding going to Japan?

ECKOLD. In the capacity of correspondent —

ORMIN. Yes, for the *Rhenish News*. So he writes me.

CLARA. You keep in touch with him?

ORMIN. Not very regularly. But since last summer, when we were accidentally thrown so much in each other's company — after many years — I've already told you all about it.

CLARA. Nowadays we never hear from him. If you hadn't brought his respects from Helgoland —

ECKOLD. What's he going to write us for? It's ten years now that he left Vienna.

ORMIN. He refers to you habitually as one of his closest friends.

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ECKOLD. Friends? [Pause.] I doubt whether I really owned a friend. Perhaps — you.

ORMIN. Oh, a good many. Possibly you make overstrict demands.

ECKOLD. Why make demands at all? Seldom, if ever, are any of them met.

ORMIN [*jestingly to Clara*]. What's come over your husband, eh? [Recollecting.] Oh, yes; his daughterkin. By God, I miss her, too. Have you had a line from her yet? No? It's hardly likely so soon.

CLARA. We received a telegram just this minute.

ECKOLD. From Innsbruck.

CLARA. Tomorrow they reach Zurich, day after tomorrow Luzerne.

ORMIN. And in the course of three weeks, I suppose, you will welcome her back home.

CLARA. Unfortunately, no. After the honeymoon they plan to move to Berlin.

ORMIN. Indeed. Is Wermann needed that bad in Berlin?

ECKOLD. Yes, now that his predecessor has been appointed Professor Extraordinary to Breslau —

ORMIN. Quite so. Oh, he'll carve out a ripping career for himself, your son-in-law will. With twenty-eight assistants at the Physiological Institute — and highly deserving of it all, let me add.

CLARA. I see no reason why it couldn't be over here just as well.

ORMIN. After all, the distance between Berlin and Vienna isn't so great.

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CLARA. Just fancy! Day before yesterday she sat here with us. For seventeen years she sat in the self-same place. [Pause.] Dear me! All these sentimental after-thoughts, I'm afraid, won't help a bit. But the wrench is — so deep!

ORMIN. I never thought you'd take it to heart this way. All fathers and mothers must steel themselves against this sort of thing.

CLARA. Of what use is your steeling yourself against it?

ECKOLD. Yes, of what use? It's infinitely better to have no children at all.

CLARA [*almost frightened*]. What a thing to say!

ECKOLD [*impenetrably*]. I say it again.

ORMIN [*tactfully*]. Well — [Pause]. Now what else did I want to tell you? Oh, yes. One of the nurses of the Red Cross accompanying my expedition is — don't start! — Madame Melanie Ormin.

CLARA. Ah!

ECKOLD. Your wife?

ORMIN. My — wife that was, yes.

ECKOLD. Old man, sure as fate, you're going to come back with all your differences patched up.

ORMIN. Not a bit of it.

CLARA. Don't forget to remember me to Melanie, when you see her.

ORMIN. You are kindly disposed to her, aren't you?

CLARA. We always got along very nicely together. You know that.

ECKOLD. Please remember me, too. And

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don't omit Floding, either. You can tell him from me it's a symptom of ungratefulness not to let himself be heard from, especially after such a bully friendship as he claims existed between us.

ORMIN. You demand, my dear Carl, more than you give. Why, you've chucked him on your own account. What do you expect?

CLARA. But, really, he liked him.

ECKOLD. Liked him? You exaggerate. He interested me. Quite an amusing cut-up, he was. Wicked and sentimental.

ORMIN. Not such an odd combination, by a long shot. That is, as far as wags who are niggardly endowed go.

ECKOLD. Niggardly endowed? You mean his halt foot. Ah, but don't you see that's why he was vouchsafed such beautiful blue eyes.

ORMIN. It's hardly the most striking paradox in his make-up. What's worse, is the fact that he possesses a poetical soul, coupled with not an ounce of poetic talent. That kind of thing spells the ruin of a man.

CLARA. I remember several lovely poems he wrote once.

ORMIN. Up to a certain age nobody objects strenuously to that. But, you see, he persists in turning them out still. Last summer — just to cite an instance — he recited several to me.

CLARA. Well?

ORMIN. The surf was simply deafening. I must beg to be excused from any criticism. [Enter servingman with a card.]

ECKOLD [*taking the card*]. Excuse me. Praxis aurea, you know. Don't go until I return.

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ORMIN. Can't promise that I'll stay that long, Carl. I've got to attend to several things before my departure.

ECKOLD. Won't you keep my wife company for a quarter of an hour or so? Call me when you're going. Now don't take yourself off uncivilly. Well, auf wiedersehen. [Goes out right.]

CLARA [*breaking in suddenly*]. This is nice, Melanie's sailing with you that way!

ORMIN. Not with me. It just happens that she's a member of the party.

CLARA. Well, if it weren't for you the idea would never have occurred to her.

ORMIN. It's idle to conjecture about that. It's bewildering all the things she's put her hand to, and carried through, too, since we separated.

CLARA. Has she been living in Vienna recently?

ORMIN. Yes, and quite an age for her. Just fancy only three months ago she returned from Madeira, where I understood she kept a foreign pension.

CLARA. I was under the impression she had tried her luck in America.

ORMIN. Quite an old story, that. Do you know that she was on the stage over there? Played in English, mind you. It came to my ears only the other day. She seems to have been tremendously versatile in her way.

CLARA. Quite a remarkable creature, I must say. Perhaps you will be happy with her yet.

ORMIN. I—

CLARA. Fifteen years ago you may have been unfit for married life.

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ORMIN. On the contrary, I was always fit. Only I didn't happen to meet the right woman. [Simply.] I made her acquaintance — several years too late.

CLARA [*smiling*]. You'd have tired of the right woman just as you did of Melanie.

ORMIN. Why do you think so? I did not tire of Melanie. That's a mistaken notion of yours. We just — Melanie and I — after a certain period took to making separate trips. Objectively, I know, it has the appearance of tiring of one another. But it wasn't my fault. I am very strong for marital fidelity. At least I am sure of this much: I was destined to the domestic sphere. More so than Carl, for instance.

CLARA. More so than Carl — you?

ORMIN. Certainly. In him, lurking deep within, there broods a suggestion of the out-and-out undomestic creature. Yes, the genius of the philanderer.

CLARA [*smiling*]. In Carl?

ORMIN. Yes, in your husband, the practicing physician, whose consultation hours are between three and four.

CLARA [*shaking her head incredulously*]. Do you call yourself a student of human nature?

ORMIN. Knowledge of human nature is an assumption for the most part. Not always accurate nor pleasant, either. But, quite seriously, we have lived, both of us — he and I — at deepest odds with our innermost selves. For I have yearned all my life long for repose, spiritual repose. Had I achieved it, I dare say, I'd have made a bigger man of myself.

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CLARA. You ought to be content.

ORMIN. Content? Are you thinking of what the world calls my career? People look up to me as a physician, as a professor, even — as if all that mattered the least bit! Under more favorable circumstances than I have been heir to, I might have accomplished greater things.

CLARA. Under more favorable — ?

ORMIN. Well, suppose we put it this way: In the peaceful atmosphere of a veritable home. Please don't think me mawkish. I have always craved for that sort of thing, but somehow it was appointed far otherwise.

CLARA. Ah, but I can read a purpose in the fact that it was appointed otherwise.

ORMIN. A purpose? I doubt it, Clara. I doubt it because I know exactly where, under more auspicious circumstances, I might have found the repose I sought in vain. [*In a more ardent, but a quite simple tone of voice.*] We both know only too well, Clara, you and I.

CLARA [gently shaking her head]. What a mad notion of yours!

ORMIN. Before saying good-bye, I thought I might be permitted to call it to mind.

CLARA. But not to utter it.

ORMIN [earnestly but not heavily]. When you feel as I do, that you have never uttered the right words, and that the occasion will not present itself soon again —

CLARA [smiling, but averting her gaze]. I hope, Ormin, you entertain no sinister presentiments.

ORMIN. Presentiments? Up to the present

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I've not gone far afield when I weighed probabilities strictly in the balance.

CLARA. But I have no presentiments whatever. And I feel, in fact I know — nothing will happen to you.

ORMIN. I'm not afraid. Bear in mind: nobody forced me to plunge headlong into the war and plague regions. The sealed purposes of Providence, however, are made more apparent to a man of my stripe from year to year.

CLARA. You are still young.

ORMIN. I? Ah, but you can say that more truthfully of Carl than of me.

CLARA. Of course you can say it of Carl too.

ORMIN. He has preserved himself better than I. His face is just as youthful as when he was an undergraduate. All around, he's had better luck than I.

CLARA [*smiling*]. In spite of his philandering instinct?

ORMIN [*continuing earnestly*]. I daresay in his profession too.

CLARA. Surely you don't envy him that, do you?

ORMIN. Why not? Is my calling on a higher plane? Sometimes an uncanny feeling seizes me when I am called to an unknown family and introduced — not to a human being, but to an ailing stomach. Eckold at least gets to know his patients.

CLARA. Nothing enviable in that —

ORMIN [*interrupting*]. Yes, Clara, the lot of a consulting physician has quite a peculiar charm. Especially when, as in Carl's case, you enjoy a

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good measure of the normal milk of human kindness.

CLARA. Do you consider Carl a kind man?

ORMIN. H'm! That's a posing question. Kind? Of course, he is kind. Every one of us is that, more or less. But kindly—? I don't know whether you follow me. True kindness or goodness is a rare and noble quality. I think one may even commit crimes in goodness, one may even sin—

CLARA. Good people would never think of doing that.

ORMIN. You are quite right. Good people, at their best, never transcend petty meannesses.

CLARA [*laughing*]. That—why, that might have been said by Floding.

ORMIN. You think so? Then, if you don't mind, I prefer to take it back.

CLARA [*somewhat taken aback*]. Our old friend, it appears, has not succeeded in winning your goodwill.

ORMIN. Last summer we were thrown together every single day. And in vacations people betray themselves more than ordinarily.

CLARA. Perhaps it was just a game of his to appear other than he is. It's like Floding. If you saw him in his true likeness, then he must have altered a good deal.

ORMIN. A man doesn't alter, Clara. He may disguise himself, he may dazzle others—at times himself. But in the deepest recesses of his soul *he* is unalterably the same.

CLARA. If one only knew where the deepest recesses of the soul are situated.

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ORMIN. There you have it. Exactly. That's why we are always the same. But I might hazard a guess, they are probably situated where our subconscious wishes slumber or give the appearance of slumbering.

CLARA. In the last analysis, Ormin, nothing matters — nothing but the deed we have accomplished; that which we have undergone in life, not that which we have desired or yearned for.

ORMIN. Quite so, Clara. And we can know mighty little about a person as long as his real features are screened behind the mist of his so-called daily affairs.

CLARA [*smiling*]. And you would have me believe that your gaze pierces this mist?

ORMIN [*earnestly*]. Sometimes. And by virtue of this penetration, for instance, the adventitious circumstance that you happen to go through life in the guise of the wife of my old chum, Carl Eckold, hasn't blinded me to the truth, namely, deep, deep within, Clara, you possess the soul of one who dares all for love.

CLARA [*growing pale*]. One who dares all for love! [*Smiling.*] You flatter me exceedingly. I love Carl, quite naturally. I have always loved him. But beyond that there's nothing extraordinary about it.

ORMIN [*earnestly*]. You know very well that's not what I was driving at.

CLARA [*with equal seriousness*]. I have never coveted any other lot. Never. I think I may be permitted to say of myself, with justice, that I have adorned, as far as lay in my power, the busy and preoccupied life of one who was dearer

## THE HOUR OF RECOGNITION

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to me than anything else in the world. It wasn't at all times an easy task. But, thank Heaven, I recognized it as my mission.

ORMIN. Yes. I can well believe that. For Carl had need of you.

CLARA. As I had need of him.

ORMIN. Is this true, Clara? Were you always convinced that Carl Eckold, and no one else, constituted the meaning and end of your life?

CLARA [*tartly*]. He and Bettina. Yes, if you wish to put it that way; the meaning and the end.

ORMIN. I beg pardon, then.

CLARA. Quite unnecessary, I assure you.

ORMIN. Today, you see, I don't care to play cocksure. I can't say: Well, until tomorrow or after tomorrow, dear lady.

CLARA [*laughing*]. Why not six months hence, then?

ORMIN [*as gently as possible*]. Let us hope so. [He starts to go, but hesitates at a movement of hers.] Oh, please don't break in on Carl. We've said good-bye already. And, with all due respect for him, the latest impression I wish to leave with you — [interrupts himself. *Simply.*] Good-bye, Clara.

CLARA. Good-bye. [*They meet at the door. He clasps her hand.*]

CLARA. Ormin!

ORMIN. Clara!

CLARA. You wear an air of having omitted something — through oversight.

ORMIN [*waveringly*]. Omitted? Who has not?

CLARA. In this connection, Ormin, let me al-

## COMEDIES OF WORDS

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lay your apprehensions before you go, at least as regards myself — I pledge my word, dear friend, you have no cause to revile yourself for anything.

ORMIN. I can't quite make out —

CLARA. Assuming that way back — ten years ago, is it not? — you had proved more tumultuous or more skillful in your manœuvring, well, you'd never have corralled me into your collection.

ORMIN. H'm. Really, I don't see why you try by this meticulous choice of words —

CLARA. Oh, I don't doubt, I'd have turned out a rare specimen. No. But it could never have been. Quite otherwise was it decreed. I don't mind telling you: I loved you.

ORMIN [*after a brief pause*]. Oh! Oh! What a wretched simpleton I was!

CLARA [*laughing low*]. You do yourself rank injustice. It didn't depend on you altogether. Had I loved you less than I did, I'd have flung myself into your arms — perhaps. But you were more to me than a mere lover. You had suddenly taken the shape of my destiny. For this reason it could never have come to pass. And you were not only my destiny —

ORMIN. What did it matter? I tell you, happiness would have been ours, Clara. How many people can say that? Happiness! Yours and mine.

CLARA. For six months going, maybe a year. And even in that brief time it would not have been vouchsafed to us unmixed.

ORMIN. We might have purified it. Drained off the dross, sooner or later.

CLARA. Never.

## THE HOUR OF RECOGNITION

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ORMIN. Bettina?

CLARA. Not for Bettina's sake alone.

ORMIN. For him? What was he to you — then?

CLARA. What was he to me? What he has always been. What he has remained to this day — to this very day. I didn't realize so clearly as at that moment that my proper place was here — that I belonged utterly to him. Never till that moment, Ormin.

ORMIN. Why just that moment?

CLARA. Never before was I so sure of myself.

[*Pause.*]

ORMIN. Forgive me, but, if my memory doesn't deceive me, your relations with Carl, at that time, left much to be desired. [*Clara gazes at him astonished.*] Oh, a blind man would have noticed that. There's no more transparent stuff than that which matrimony is made of. At a pinch the individual can disguise himself, but in the sphere of human relationships masquerade is impossible.

CLARA [*after a brief hesitation*]. We were estranged at the time, if that's what you're aiming at. I won't attempt to dissemble. But despite that, indeed, for that very reason — [*interrupting herself, then more ardently.*] You will never understand! You've never conceived what marriage means — what marriage under certain circumstances may grow to mean. You've no idea of a year-in, year-out pull together — and ours was a long pull together! What links are wrought, stronger than anything else which passion can forge between one man and one woman!

## COMEDIES OF WORDS

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Notwithstanding all the tugging and gnawing, the link holds firm. The couple belong to one another beyond recall. And one feels this all the more keenly —

ORMIN. When one chafes burningly to part.

CLARA. Do you appreciate the truth of your words? In the midst of black distrust and pangs, the two people belong to one another just the same — and later on, more irrevocably, more inescapably by reason of their mutual devotion and tenderness. I hadn't the courage to leave him. Then less than ever. Do you follow me now? [*with a soft smile*]. All your overtures, as you see, would have fallen short. And so, when all's said, you've no grounds to reproach yourself.

ORMIN. Whether I follow you or not — what's the odds today? But that you should tell it to me now —

CLARA [*without looking at him*]. I had to, Ormin, sooner or later..

ORMIN [*very softly*]. You seem to be in doubt whether we shall meet again — here or elsewhere.

CLARA [*tumultuously*]. Please don't carry away a spurious image of me —

ORMIN. Into eternity.

CLARA. Into the far-away.

ORMIN. It makes you happy thinking I shall carry into the far-away the image of a saint, rather than that of a woman —

CLARA. I don't pretend to be a saint. That description fits me much less than the other.

ORMIN. Let's not attach too much weight to mere words.

## THE HOUR OF RECOGNITION

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CLARA. For my part you may attach to them whatever weight you like. I come equally short of sainthood as I do of the passion of the woman who dares all for love. Believe me, I am a mere woman, like hundreds and thousands of other women. Perhaps no worse, but certainly no better.

ORMIN. That sounds as if — [*approaching her.*] Is there yet another secret, Clara?

CLARA. None whatever for you, Ormin, in this hour.

ORMIN. None — ?

CLARA. None.

ORMIN. Do I follow you rightly, Clara ?

CLARA. Certainly.

ORMIN. Still it's a secret — [*pause.*]

CLARA. A name — ? Does that signify ?

ORMIN. I am not inquisitive.

CLARA. Life is full of strange coincidences, Ormin. Tomorrow at this hour you will be strolling up and down the deck of the *Amphitrite* in his company —

ORMIN. In his — ? What's that you say? In his — why, it's —

CLARA. Yes.

ORMIN. If that is so, then there was no chance of its ever turning into destiny for you.

CLARA. Why do you ask? [*Glancing meaningfully about the room.*] Here is your answer.

ORMIN. I mean a chance that you could not possibly foresee.

CLARA. Perhaps there was none.

ORMIN. You will never convince me, Clara, that you plunged cold-bloodedly into an affair of

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this ilk. There must be some reason why it was just he —

CLARA. Hurt vanity! It's just like a man to seek an explanation of a commonplace affair of this sort, if he happens not to have been the —

ORMIN. Lucky fellow.

CLARA. The lucky fellow?

ORMIN. You must have loved him?

CLARA. I don't mean to deny it.

ORMIN. More than you loved me?

CLARA [*laughing involuntarily*]. Less than you.

ORMIN. And yet, will you say, that he never could have been your destiny? He too might have been that. It would have been beyond your strength to resist if he had clung to you, if he had not released you, if he had claimed what was his due —

CLARA. Due? He claimed no more than I was ready to grant him. Life had not pampered him like some of the others.

ORMIN [*softly, to himself*]. Like some of the others.

CLARA. He was always lonesome — from childhood. He never knew the quiet of a father's house.

ORMIN. And, that being the case, you could pose as something of a sister and mother —

CLARA. We were lovers.

ORMIN [*still simply*]. And you were the first heavenly ray to penetrate a lugubrious existence.

CLARA. I was.

ORMIN. Well, I must say, you had good reason to nourish the delusion.

## THE HOUR OF RECOGNITION

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CLARA. That's what I was to him. Perhaps I was more than mere happiness in his life. I don't know the kind of man life has made of him today. It cannot have offered him all that he hoped for, all that perhaps he sought. But I know the man he was then. You, Ormin, did not know him. No. In fact, nobody knew him. Who troubled to peer into that cynical and solitary soul? I alone did. That is why I, of all people, can mean anything to him. And at the time I was the whole world to him — and without jeopardizing the calm of a third person concerned.

ORMIN. After all, it was an escapade.

CLARA. Escapade?

ORMIN. An affair. Fortunately, it came at a time when you were ripe for it.

CLARA [*shaking her head*]. I foresaw it. [Ormin gazes quizzically into her face.] You make out my real features behind the mist. You discern them all. Everything is as you have said. Behind the mist of sensations and impressions is limned the true image of what I am in my deepest self. [*After a light sob.*] I shouldn't have told you, Ormin.

ORMIN. Do you regret, Clara? I am grateful to you. It is so beautiful, so splendid that you — that both of us in this hour should have been able to speak out at last.

CLARA. Are we quite sure —?

ORMIN. Clara!

CLARA. Well, perhaps you are right. If it were only a question of words!

ORMIN. We will forget the words. Nothing depends on them. They are only —

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[*Eckold comes in from the right.*]

ECKOLD. Eh, still here? Good!

CLARA. I was just about to call you.

ORMIN [*ready to leave*]. Dear chap —

ECKOLD. Thanks awfully for waiting.

ORMIN. I must say goodbye now.

ECKOLD. No use keeping you any longer.

Once more, bon voyage —

[*They shake hands.*] Don't you know, Ormin — no sense in hiding it from you at this stage — I sort of envy you.

ORMIN. You do? Well, why not come along? Give up your practice for a few months and join us.

ECKOLD. What would I do? Surgery's not in my line.

ORMIN. That makes no bones. I guess we can handle the epidemic well enough. No red herring there for you, is there?

ECKOLD. Going's out of the question, even if it tempted me. I'm the sort of person who never gets beyond the wishing stage.

ORMIN [*to Clara*]. Isn't he a little unjust to himself?

CLARA. That's what I keep telling him sometimes.

ECKOLD. Well [*pause*] — good luck. Cure them by the thousands. And, mind you, come back whole yourself.

ORMIN. I hope for the best. Well, adieu. Think of me sometimes. Auf wiedersehen, Clara. [*He extends his hand and goes.*] Silence.] [*Eckold glances at the clock and rings.* Servingman enters.]

## THE HOUR OF RECOGNITION

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ECKOLD. Has anyone else come in since?

SERVINGMAN. No, sir.

ECKOLD. Cab gone off yet?

SERVINGMAN [*going to window*]. Not yet, sir.

[*Exit.*]

CLARA. It's only half-past five. [*She goes to the window. Eckold seats himself and takes the newspaper.*]

CLARA [*turning toward him*]. You had something to say to me.

ECKOLD. It will wait till tomorrow.

CLARA. About Bettina, isn't it? Family inheritance? Any difficulties? You were to the notary's today.

ECKOLD. Yes. The affair of the inheritance is going very smoothly. In a week or two everything will be adjusted. In any case, Bettina won't stick at a trifle. But — I wanted to ask you; you long for her very much, don't you?

CLARA. And you?

ECKOLD. Goes without saying. But I — I have my profession. You, I daresay, will find it harder getting used to her being away.

CLARA. I was prepared for it.

ECKOLD. Even so. Your whole life, at least during the past year, was wrapped up in Bettina. And you will feel an empty gap now.

CLARA [*forcing a smile*]. Oh, but there are heaps of things to distract one.

ECKOLD [*staring straight ahead*]. At all events. If you care to go over to Berlin — don't trouble about me. Go. [*Clara gazes at him astonished.*]

ECKOLD. I won't object at all. Less so, con-

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sidering that Bettina is no longer with us, and there is no further need of our living together now.

CLARA. You amaze me.

ECKOLD. What amazes you?

CLARA [*portraying growing astonishment*]. You want to — you mean I should go away to Berlin?

ECKOLD. Merely a suggestion. Of course, we will have to canvass the details. But all things considered, I believe —

CLARA. What can this mean? What sudden idea is this?

ECKOLD. Sudden? It only looks that way to you. Until now I didn't mention it. The time wasn't ripe for it. I like to talk about things only when they have become, in a measure, realizable. But let me assure you it's an old notion of mine that after Bettina's marriage it might be a good thing to give up living together.

CLARA. Living to —

ECKOLD. Yes. Quite an old notion — a cherished notion, I might say. Let me see; I can tell you exactly how old it is — even to the very day it first struck me. It's ten years now. Last May it was ten years to a day. Do you follow me?

[*He stands directly opposite her. They eye each other closely. Pause.*]

CLARA. You mean that for ten whole years you kept silent?

ECKOLD. Yes. For ten whole years. But I'm not making a bid for your admiration. One must only be certain about what one wants. And I was certain. To trouble the outward calm of our existence, to bring about a deep-rooted re-

## THE HOUR OF RECOGNITION

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vulsion of our life-relationship, while our daughter was still living under the roof of her parents would have been highly impractical, not to say immoral. And it would be just as immoral if we continued living together in our old way now that Bettina's gone.

CLARA. You kept silent ten whole years?

ECKOLD. I knew to-day had to come. Indeed, I lived in anticipation of it.

CLARA. Ten years you have waited for to-day? I can't bring myself to believe it. I credit no man with such self-control, least of all you, Carl.

ECKOLD. You have always underrated me. That I know. Both of you have underrated me.  
[Pause.]

CLARA. Why didn't you send me away then?

ECKOLD. With equal right I might ask: Why didn't you go away of your own accord?

CLARA. I can answer that very easily. Because I held this to be my home. Because this was my home, no matter what had happened.

ECKOLD. That view has its advantages, no doubt, especially its extraordinary convenience.

CLARA. It was your view too.

ECKOLD. Oh —

CLARA. Yes, it was. Otherwise what's to have prevented your showing me the door? It would have been only right, considering the opinion you held of me. What prevented you at the time, I haven't the slightest doubt, was the feeling that at bottom our relations were still the same.

ECKOLD. Ah!

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CLARA. No act of mine could have wrought a complete change.

ECKOLD. I don't quite grasp your —

CLARA. We were too far apart, as it was. That was the point. And what happened then had very little to do with our estrangement.

ECKOLD. Estrangement? To what period do you allude? What do you call estrangement?

CLARA. Slipped your memory, has it? That which made everything else sufferable?

ECKOLD. Ah, yes, I know what you mean. You refer to the most dismal period of my life, when I was burdened down with cares and struggles; when I had finally to relinquish my academic and scientific dreams. I was doomed then — not because I lacked the necessary qualifications — I was doomed to remain a hack in my calling, instead of achieving what came as a windfall to others. I grant you, I was very ill-tempered. But I can picture the type of woman who would, at such a pass, have stood stoutly by the side of the man and cheered him and compensated him for all the meannesses he had to encounter in the world of daily affairs. You, however, attempted to make of my melancholy a kind of fault. And this estrangement — convenient word — was nothing more than a welcome refuge whereby you could seek your happiness elsewhere.

CLARA. You're not fair to me, Carl. I tried my very best at the time to lift you above your disillusionments and trying experiences. But I wasn't strong enough for the task. Perhaps I tired too quickly. But it never for a moment occurred to me to blame you for your unfortunate tempera-

## THE HOUR OF RECOGNITION

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ment, as you charge. That this estrangement came about, was nobody's fault, yours no more than mine. It may be that human relations are subject to the same ailments as human beings. Surely you feel the truth of this. And so, all along you must have known that the obvious fact itself — the betrayal, as it used to be called, has very little significance outside of this. Otherwise, you would not have put up with it as you did.

ECKOLD. You think so? I see that I owe you an explanation as to how I could and did put up with it. To begin with, I was forewarned. I had the good sense to perceive destiny draw near. One can always do that. Some people shut their eyes tightly when it approaches. I refused to do so. And in this way I was clever enough to anticipate you. Do you follow me? Fling my vanity the dole. I didn't wait until the minute when your destiny and mine were consummated. I beheld it approaching. It was inevitable. And thus I prepared for it. It's surprising that you did not once suspect me. How little you must have cared for me! And I made no secret of it at all. Why he, your lover, knew all about it. Didn't he tell you? Odd! Perhaps it's slipped your memory. Well, it makes no difference. Destiny was fairly merciful, especially since I had all my plans worked out for the future.

CLARA [*in a quiet voice*]. It would have been more delicate to have shown me the door.

ECKOLD. And more delicate of you to have gone away at the right time. Such matters are

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never very delicate. It wouldn't have been practical to have parted then.

CLARA. Surely you don't believe that?

ECKOLD. Why not? Would my decision appear more conscionable, do you think, if I rolled my eyes, lifted my hand to strike you and stormed about like a madman? I might have done it ten years ago, had I been a fool. You can't expect it today.

CLARA. There's no one here to witness the scene, Carl — no one. You will please consider me as little importunate as I consider you a —

ECKOLD. A what?

CLARA. A comedian who simply won't have his big scene ruined. Well, let this suffice. You wanted your triumph. You have it. And let it content you. As you may imagine I shall try to be with Bettina as often as possible. That's my own wish. But of what use is all the rest? Why sever our relationship today? Why? Since we know that nothing of the sort is apt to happen again, there's nothing I can see which would justify such a belated punishment and revenge. We can still go on being what we have been to one another in these latter years. Throughout all these years, thank heaven, you haven't always played comedy parts. It's beyond human endurance. You would have forgiven me, at heart, long ago, even if you did not forgive yourself. Oh, before, a long time before we came to be nothing but good friends —

ECKOLD. Good friends? Mere words! Naturally there's this thing and that to talk about when one is living together under the same roof,

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especially because of the many common interests. Above all, when there is a child. If you care to call such a bond friendship, I'm sure I have no objection. For my own part, however, I always held my life to be apart from yours, and I have lived in anticipation of this hour.

CLARA. But only since we became nothing more than house companions. Once it was different.

ECKOLD. It was never different.

CLARA. It was different! Recollect. After the dark hour of estrangement, of lies, if you will, there came another, a better time when we found each other again.

ECKOLD. We? Found one another —?

CLARA. We both realized what we had suffered without unlocking our lips. And many wounds were healed. Everything, in fact. Yes. Try to recall. We were happy again as in the past, happier than we had ever been. You could never glean that from your intercourse with the world. Call to mind our wonderful trip — soon after. And the glorious days in Rome, in Naples. You threw off your comedy part. Let everything else crumble. But when we were again reconciled after our — respective affairs and we had learned anew what we meant to each other — that was no lie, no self-deception! Only make an effort to recall. It's a little hard to speak of it today. But you know and I know that at no time was I so utterly yours. Never, even in our earliest years of married life, was I so completely your ideal as then when we found each other again.

ECKOLD. Nonsense!

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CLARA. It can't be —

ECKOLD. It is. You were neither my wife, nor my ideal — much less than later, for instance, you were my friend. You couldn't be that to me again.

CLARA. Carl!

ECKOLD. Yes, I recall. It possesses its own peculiar allurement, the time you speak of. But you were not my ideal. At the very best —

CLARA [*passionately*]. Don't say what's utterly beyond cure!

ECKOLD. Why should there be a cure? You will always be the same to me.

CLARA. Carl! If this be true —

ECKOLD. It is true!

CLARA. You should have told me this before you took me back. You had the right, it may be, to drive me away, even to kill me, if you wished. But the right to conceal the punishment you had meted out to me was not yours — You have deceived me more nefariously and a thousandfold more cowardly than I have deceived you. You have demeaned me lower than one human being has a right to demean another human being!

ECKOLD [*triumphing*]. Do you feel that? Does it cut you to the heart? Ah, that's as it should be. It was worth waiting ten years for this hour, this hour when you feel your degradation as trenchantly as I felt mine then.

CLARA. I never degraded you.

ECKOLD. Yes, you did. You degraded me, made me look ridiculous and heaped insult upon insult. Were it not he, I might perhaps have for-

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gotten — forgiven. My anger would have dissolved into thin air, my hate would have vanished. But you gave yourself to him of all people — to him who has inherited all things from childhood — everything which was denied me. I was filled with doubts and qualms. But it was he who always gave himself airs, held himself a better man because, forsooth, nature had endowed him with a gayer temperament. That galled my heart. But it also lent me patience to allow my hate to swell.

CLARA. He? What piece of good fortune did he come into? Who on earth is so fortunate that you should speak such words of envy?

ECKOLD. Do you hide his precious name still — Ormin's name? The lordly Ormin's, the superior Ormin's, the favorite of the gods —

CLARA [*stupefied*]. Ormin? But that — Ormin? Suppose it's all a mistake?

ECKOLD. Eh? What sudden notion of yours is this?

CLARA. Produce your evidence, if you have any. Produce it.

ECKOLD. The trick comes too late. Ten times — a hundred times you betrayed yourself. But how could you fancy that all suspicions were disarmed, and all foresight provided, simply because he engaged lodgings for your dove-cote under an assumed name? Naturally, the investigations were made a trifle difficult through the genial pseudonym of Ernst Mayer, but they led eventually to the goal, even though it was just in the nick of time. Had you broken with him on the tenth of May instead of on the next day, then I should have had practically no evidence against

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you. For on the next day, a little nervous perhaps about your security, Mr. Ernst Mayer decided to go away on a journey — it is not recorded where — and your love's young dream came to an end. I am quite well posted, am I not? And how beautifully everything adjusted itself for us. Had I also seen you disappear on the next day from that house —

CLARA. Well?

ECKOLD. Oh, I don't know. Maybe your dove-cote episode would have ended tragically. For a trace of folly will be found in every one of us — in the Ormins as well as the Eckolds of the world. As it was, however, I had time to think it over. I did think it over and came to the conclusion that I would keep silent until today.

CLARA. And in his presence today —

ECKOLD. Why should I trouble about him? Sentimental ninny! Who in his old age, realizing that his gifts are growing stale, crosses the sea, seeking in the romantic atmosphere of pestilence and war, a reconciliation with his worthy wife —

CLARA. Why do you abuse him?

ECKOLD. Why not? Wasn't his whole life a public abuse of me?

CLARA. If you felt that way about it why didn't you say so to his face today?

ECKOLD. Men need not talk earnestly and in detail about such things. What women mean to me, what women have meant to me from a certain moment in my life, others as well as you, I've never hidden from him. In the same way he has always known that I have penetrated to the inner-

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most recesses of his rather delicate and complacent soul.

CLARA. There is nothing to see in him. He never played comedy parts as you have. He was always truthful.

ECKOLD. Is the old witchery still effective, do you think? Positively you are beginning to pity me.

CLARA. I don't need to. I've been happy in my time, as happy as any woman can hope to be. I am still happy today — in the consciousness that I once belonged to him. Nothing can rob me of that memory. It was he and no one else. And I loved him beyond words. Beyond words — do you follow me? As I have loved nobody else in the world. Oh, I shall never forget that I was happy in this house and that I was intimate for so many years with no one as with you. And you, too, later, when you are calmer, will call to mind those happy hours. But what were the gifts life offered, what was domestic happiness, maternal bliss, compared to the lease of blessed ecstasy when I was — his — his — when I was his all-in-all —

ECKOLD. You saw him today for the last time. Do you realize that? You understand now why I forewent the opportunity of explanation with him.

CLARA. I understand. Oh, I understand everything so lucidly that I am going to leave this house — tonight.

ECKOLD. We are of one mind. But why leave just today? I give you leave to stay as long as you like.

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CLARA. As it is, it is ten years too late.

ECKOLD [*shrugging his shoulders*]. You know my view. Really I'm not unthankful toward those first years of our marriage, but today — but today the time had come to speak about those other matters. Cruel words in cases like this are unavoidable. [*Glances out of the window.*] I haven't given up hope altogether that later, perhaps, we will talk quietly. Have you nothing else to say to me? Well, then, this — this evening let it be. There are, of course, certain necessary formal matters to be discussed. I have to go now — I must [*hesitates, then*] — Adieu. [*Clara remains silent. Eckold goes out. Clara stands alone for a space, rigid and immobile; then, as if awaking from a trance, she darts into the room on the left, and returns almost immediately with her hat and wraps. She hesitates. Then seating herself at the small secretary, she takes a blank sheet of paper and starts to write. Almost inaudibly.*]

CLARA. What's the good? Words lie. [*Rising.*] Bettina? She needs me no longer. [*Rings.*]

MAID [*who has entered*]. Did you ring, madam?

CLARA. I shall be home rather late tonight. Don't wait with the supper. [*Goes out. The maid gazes at her somewhat perplexed.*]

[CURTAIN.]

# THE BIG SCENE

## A PLAY IN ONE ACT

### PERSONS

CONRAD HERBOT, *an actor.*

SOPHIE, *his wife.*

EDGAR GLEY.

DOCTOR FALK, *director of a theatre.*

VILMA FLAMM.

A BELL-HOP.

A THEATRE EMPLOYEE.

[SCENE. *An apartment in a fashionable hotel. There is a door framed in the back wall giving onto the corridor; another, hung with portières, on the left, conducting to an adjoining room. Down left, a fireplace with brightly burning logs. Directly in front of the fireplace, a small table with a settee. In the centre, a thought to the right, an ordinary escritoire with telephone apparatus.*

*Alongside the escritoire, as if tentatively pushed up, is a divan. In the back, left, alcoves skillfully concealed by curtains. There is a rather large window on the right affording a glimpse of the theatre vis-a-vis. Two wardrobes flank either side of the door in the back.*

*Late afternoon on a day toward the end of*

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*fall. For several minutes the room remains vacant. Then, a knock. Pause. The knocking is resumed.*

*A Bell-hop glides in by way of the door in the back. He is carrying several letters. Almost simultaneously Sophie enters from the other door.]*

SOPHIE. Letters? [The Bell-hop intent on putting the letters on the escritoire approaches her.] Any for me? [She relieves him of the letters and glances hastily through the pile. She puts three on the escritoire and keeps one in her hand.] Ah! From him. [The Bell-hop goes. Sophie moves to the window with the letter, which she proceeds feverishly to open. She reads it, smiles as if pleased, shakes her head and then resumes reading. In the midst of this, she is interrupted by another knock.] Come in.

[The Bell-hop re-enters, this time with a card which he hands to Sophie.]

SOPHIE. Vilma Flamm? I don't recollect ever meeting her.

BELL-HOP. The lady says she comes by previous appointment.

SOPHIE. By previous appointment? Ah, quite so. You will please inform the lady that my husband — that Mr. Herbot, actor by appointment to the Burgtheatre, is not at home. [The Bell-hop goes.]

SOPHIE [continues reading her letter. Her face shows that she is profoundly touched]. No. What an idea! Surely he doesn't believe — [a knock]. I wonder what that is now? Come in.

## THE BIG SCENE

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[*Vilma Flamm enters. She is a girl somewhere in the vicinity of twenty-two, fashionably but not, one would say, expensively gowned. Nor, taken all in all, is she particularly attractive, due perhaps to the fact that her hat is so immense and her coif so distinctly and unmistakably of Pre-Raphaelite origin. Her eyes are lustrous and dark. She is slightly ill at ease under Sophie's appraising look.*]

VILMA. I beg your pardon —

SOPHIE. Miss Flamm, I believe —?

VILMA. Yes. I come at the request of —

SOPHIE. Didn't the boy tell you? Mr. Herbot is not at home just now.

VILMA. I hope you will forgive me, but I couldn't help thinking there must be some mistake since Mr. Herbot asked me here at five today. I'm afraid I am a trifle late. Do you expect Mr. Herbot back shortly?

SOPHIE [*extremely cool*]. I can't say for certain. Don't you think you had better call again some other time? Or — would you prefer waiting in the lobby?

VILMA. I — wait? I'm not strong on the art of waiting. And besides — I presume you are Mr. Herbot's secretary?

SOPHIE. No, I am his wife.

VILMA [*involuntarily*]. Ah!

SOPHIE. The announcement seems to occasion you a good deal of amazement, Miss Flamm.

VILMA. Oh no. Only I was under the impression — to be sure, it's common gossip by now, that Mr. Herbot is divorced from his wife.

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SOPHIE [*with admirable self-possession*]. A mistake, I assure you.

VILMA. Thank Heaven for that.

SOPHIE [*wheeling half-way round*]. Very good of you to say so, I'm sure. [*With greater affableness.*] If you'd care to leave a message for my husband — ?

VILMA. I do hope you won't mind! But, you see, it's rather of a personal nature. I came expecting to get a try-out from Mr. Herbot, who has made a great name for himself at the Burg-theatre.

SOPHIE. A try-out?

VILMA. Perhaps I ought to tell you that I am preparing myself for a career on the stage. For six months, or thereabouts, I've been a pupil of Madame Fuchs. But lately I have gotten into the habit of questioning very seriously whether her method is quite the correct one. It goes without saying, that the members of my family are utterly opposed to the idea. My father's a merchant in the city — Flamm and Sons, Haberdashers. The sons are my brothers. I gave Mr. Herbot full particulars about myself in a letter which I sent him a little over a week ago. And in reply Mr. Herbot was generous enough to call this appointment for five o'clock today. I suppose he's forgotten all about it.

SOPHIE. Quite possible, since, as you say, he made it eight days ago — [*A knock.*]

VILMA [*eagerly*]. Come in. Oh — I beg — your pardon.

[*Sophie smiles involuntarily. The Bell-hop appears with a card.*]

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SOPHIE. Oh, certainly. Show him in.

[*Falk enters. He is a small slender man, clean-shaven, with a pair of keen penetrating eyes. He wears a tortoise-shell pince-nez which he removes instinctively from time to time from the bridge of his nose. He is wearing an overcoat. In one hand he clutches a stick and in the other a manuscript case.*]

FALK. Well, here I am. I didn't wait to be shown in.

SOPHIE [quite beside herself with joy. Offering him her hand]. Good evening, dear friend. [To Vilma, who remains standing gazing wide-eyed at the director.] You will pardon me, Miss Flamm, but, if I were you, I would write again.

VILMA. Would it be too presumptuous to beg you to present me to the director —

[*Falk turns away after shooting a withering glance at Vilma.*]

SOPHIE [slightly confused]. For the moment — I — have forgotten your name —

VILMA. If you will allow me, I will introduce myself: I am Vilma Flamm, actress by profession — an actress, that is, about to be. Herr Director you see before you one of your most ardent admirers. I rarely visit any other theatre but yours. So I would take this opportunity —

FALK. But I would not. [*Turns away.*]

VILMA. It was wholly unintentional, I assure you. It must have been the hand of destiny —

FALK. Perhaps. If so, then you have entirely misread the drift of this hand. I do not discuss theatrical business outside of my office, and

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there only between two and three, afternoons, by previous arrangement.

VILMA. Then may I call on you tomorrow at two — ?

FALK. Please don't put yourself out, my dear young lady. We have no vacancy at the present moment. But you are young yet; my advice to you is to try the provinces. Germany, believe me, is rich in excellent —

VILMA [*as if suddenly struck with the idea*]. Theatres.

FALK. Railways. Good evening, Miss —

VILMA. At all events, I shall never forget this hour.

FALK. I can't put a stop to your memory, I'm sure.

VILMA. Good evening, Mrs. Herbot. Good evening, Herr Director.

[*She goes out.*]

FALK [*still flourishing his stick*]. Why do you let people of that description cross your threshold, Mrs. Herbot. May I — ?

[*He places his stick and overcoat on the divan, but retains the case in his hand.*]

SOPHIE. I couldn't help it. She came in unawares. Herbot, it seems, had made an appointment with her in order, as she says, to give her a try-out.

FALK. One shouldn't object to that. Occasionally he is obsessed with the idea of instructing the young.

SOPHIE. There are times when — I — I feel as if I must pack my things and leave him.

FALK. It wouldn't pay, that. As regards this

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would-be actress, she needn't trouble you nor me nor even him very much. Proof is, he wasn't even at home when she called.

SOPHIE. He wrote her eight days ago when, supposedly, he was divorced.

FALK. Oh no.

SOPHIE. And if I hadn't come yesterday —

FALK [*seizing the occasion*]. But you are here, my dear Sophie. Let's keep to that just now. And that's why I've come: to offer you my welcome and congratulations on your return.

SOPHIE. Thanks. I gladly accept your welcome. But as to the congratulations — do you think they are à propos?

FALK. Indeed they are. A thousand congratulations. I've already congratulated your husband at rehearsal today, and I daresay I have every reason in the world to congratulate myself, besides, on winning back my star actor.

SOPHIE. But you never lost him, to begin with.

FALK. Still —

SOPHIE. Oh, I followed his repertory day by day. He played, in all, from September 1st until today, October 30th. Six times a week, and in the course of this period he created two brand-new parts, one classic and the other modern. And both, I understand, were successes.

FALK. Successes? H'm. That's as you look at it. To my way of thinking, he made a fizzle of these parts. Why, I couldn't help hissing him myself — under my breath, of course, because noisy manifestations of disapproval are prohibited in my theatre. Oh yes; he made a hit with the gallery. What else do you expect? Good

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Heavens, a dozen geniuses can be ruined and laid away before the great general public or, for that matter, the critics get even an inkling that one of the most cherished idols of the day is threatening to topple. Only the other day,— it was in Tasso — he tripped up disgracefully on lines no fewer than seven times. The gullible, easily credulous public, I daresay, thought each slip-up a fresh nuance. In addition he's fallen into a habit of mouthing — the same mannerism, in fact, which he used to pull off before I came along and literally rescued him from the Burgtheatre.

SOPHIE. Don't try to cry down the Burgtheatre. It's superior to — most others.

FALK. Oh, of course. That's a regular little pet view which you Viennese hold. Let me tell you, dear Sophie, it would have spelled the end of Herbot as an actor if he —

SOPHIE. If he had stayed on at the Burgtheatre?

FALK. Ah — no. I mean, if you two had not been brought together again. As a patron of German art in general and as a director of a theatre in particular, I was bound to bring you both to your senses.

SOPHIE. Oh!

FALK. And to thrust you into his arms.

SOPHIE. Indeed? Then it was the theatre director, not my husband, who sent me those appealing letters.

FALK. Appealing or not, at all events, I am gratified that they were not sent unavailingly. And I can't help coddling myself into thinking that

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not only my theatre, but Herbot himself and you, above all, are going to gain by it.

SOPHIE. Will you not admit — be truthful now! — that I acted a little precipitately in coming so soon.

FALK. I don't think so. But, touching those other things, I don't care to be pretentious. It is for the best; it is good for you too, that Herbot and you have made it up. You belong to one another. Yes, apart from whatever indiscretions you may have committed or may, in future, commit!

SOPHIE. You!

FALK. I mean, either of you. And as for him — well, this is by no means the first time that I've called your attention to it — you must really take him as he is. Wherever geniuses are to be considered, you can always count on a certain amount of poignant grief to directors as well as to women.

SOPHIE. Except that, in the case of the director, the grief has its recompense.

FALK. Don't say that, Sophie. Ultimately, it has its recompense for you women, too. You must exult exquisitely, you women, when you realize that a jack-a-napes fashioned along Herbot's lines, is directly dependent on you, and that this dependency increases from year to year. In short, if you will have the truth, he can neither live nor act without you. Don't you perceive, Sophie, if ever there existed an indisputable mark of love, then here it is. And since you cannot live without him —

SOPHIE. I'm not so sure of that.

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FALK. Well, at all events, you are here. The rest will follow, if it hasn't already. But let me have a good look at you, Sophie. Seclusion, it seems, has worked wonders with you — if seclusion it was.

SOPHIE. Doctor! Whatever can you be thinking of?

FALK. Well, assuming for an instant it were true, nobody would count it against you. Least of all, he. And revenge, if you'll forgive the bromide, is said to be sweet.

SOPHIE. Revenge is a thing I do not understand.

FALK. Oh, well, it doesn't matter much because revenge — at least in cases like this — rarely comes unalloyed. For the doer of vengeance, so called, a good deal of the sweetness is thinned in the process, a fact which has somehow got itself overlooked in the proverb. Why are you laughing, Sophie?

SOPHIE. What you just said, is very clever. But how ruthlessly you'd cut it out, if by chance you came across it in the dialogue of one of your playwrights!

FALK. Well, what do you expect? Wisdom on the stage is like sowing the sands. It's altogether out of place. But to take up again our uncut dialogue: Ah, but you have grown slenderer and a shade paler in complexion.

SOPHIE. You only fancy so, doctor. I'm looking fine. And, all in all, I had a splendid time. Seclusion isn't such a bad thing after all — and bracing, quite bracing, believe me. Just think: to stroll for hours along the stretch of

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beach or to lose oneself in some beautiful book or to lie, perfectly relaxed, in a boat and gaze up, drinking in the blue immensity of the heavens; but, above and beyond all this, not to have to listen to lies, lies — the whole livelong day.

FALK. You exaggerate, Sophie. Lies — ! There are no such things as lies in the world. There are only people who permit themselves to be fooled. And you were never one of them, Sophie. On the other hand, there are certain human relations that are founded on lies. Only this fact must be ignored, never traded on. In spite of everything, Herbot loves you and has always loved you. This is the undeniable truth, no matter what has happened.

SOPHIE. And will happen in the future, you must add.

FALK. It will never happen again. This would-be tragedy queen in her rather piteous dilemma is negligible, any way you take her. Surely Herbot couldn't foresee eight days ago that you'd give in. He probably wanted to lay in fuel for the winter.

SOPHIE. Do you condone this sort of thing too? Do you realize that he wrote me daily, though I haven't replied with so much as a couple of cool lines. And what letters!

FALK. More beautiful than mine?

SOPHIE. It seemed that he had no other thought, no other longing but for me.

FALK. Which is quite true. Shall I tell you, Sophie, how this spoiled child wept like a babe because of you. You won't take unfair advantage of the confidence, I hope. And not only did

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he come up and weep in my quiet chambers, but recently, the other day, in fact, we were sitting in the restaurant and he was to all intents and purposes gay; and then suddenly he dropped his head on the table and commenced whimpering like a dog.

SOPHIE. And in your apartment, you say, he wept like a babe. Doubtless this is a fine distinction.

FALK. Well then, if you'll have it so, like a dog —

SOPHIE. But in the restaurant, I suppose, you first opened a "pottle Sec," as he calls it.

FALK. No use denying it.

SOPHIE. He did drink with you —

FALK. Only when despair got the better of him.

SOPHIE. But you'll admit that he got pleasure out of it.

FALK. Yes. Life runs its course. That's from one of my playwrights. Not very profound, I daresay, but it hits the bull's-eye. And so what can we do but resign ourselves to our destinies? Tonight, after the final curtain of *Hamlet* — 11.45 — in honor of the reunion of husband and wife, and of the cause of German art, we'll blow ourselves to a "pottle" of wine. And I promise you, he won't start whimpering tonight — But what the deuce can be keeping him so long?

SOPHIE. His usual afternoon stroll — or, who knows, he may be betraying me with some tragedienne or banker's wife — or simply a shop-girl.

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FALK. Oh please! Betraying you — ! Before Hamlet? Incredible!

SOPHIE [*laughing involuntarily*]. What's that you're promenading back and forth?

FALK. Oh this? This is a new play. A very interesting part for him? I want him to look at it. Now that the affair [*with a bow*] has been successfully concluded, I know I can trust in his judgment.

SOPHIE. You flatter me.

FALK. But, tell me, when did you arrive, Frau Sophie, which being rendered into our beloved German tongue, means, not without good reason, Frau Wisdom.

SOPHIE. Last night. Oh, you needn't pull a wry face. The hotel was overcrowded. We got this room this morning.

FALK. Seriously now, doesn't it speak well for him that he has kept your charming apartment locked up and sworn an oath that he won't cross the threshold except arm in arm with you?

SOPHIE. Oh yes, there are some oaths which he keeps. You see, the hotel, being directly opposite the theatre, is altogether more convenient for — try-outs and coaching —

FALK. Enough. Either you're reconciled or you're not reconciled. Why are you suspicious? Have you any grounds? Quite frankly, I didn't come here with the single purpose of congratulating you. There is a promise I want to obtain from you, if I can.

SOPHIE. A promise?

FALK. That you won't go through the same rigmarole again.

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SOPHIE. Rigmarole? I?

FALK. I mean, that you won't leave him again. I can't afford accidents in the middle of the season. This time you fled on August 14th, and it wasn't until September 1st that he recovered sufficiently to act. Now wouldn't I be in a fine fix, if you were to do it again when the play we're producing happens to be a hit? I simply can't let matters reach that pass. And so I want you to promise me —

SOPHIE. Hadn't we better sign a contract?

FALK. Contract —? Oh please! I wish you to give your promise gratuitously, out of a sense of conviction, insight and understanding of my position. He, I know, won't trespass again. As a conductor of a place of amusement, you realize that I am committed, like the prohibition of smoking in the theatre, to anticipate every eventuality. And so if this little thing should happen again —

SOPHIE. Doctor! You amaze me. Little thing! Have I been speaking to the four winds? Or must I assume that in this lying world, even such a respectable member of society — such a gentleman as yourself, has lost, along with the rest, the power to differentiate between levity and — baseness?

FALK. But — but —

SOPHIE. Under such circumstances, how can I come back to him?

FALK. You needn't come back to him. To begin with, you should not go away at all. Why don't you take things less tragically? You can do it. You have proved it over and over again.

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To be truthful with you, I can't understand why you left this time — ?

SOPHIE. You can't understand? You, who have been a bystander through it all, from beginning to end?

FALK. You remember three years ago? I was a bystander to that too. As far as I can tell, the cases are alike. Faithless once, faithless always. Why did you leave this time — ?

SOPHIE. They are different, dear friend. At that time we two alone, Herbot and I, had to make it up with one another. The happiness of other people was not at stake.

FALK. Of course a third person was involved. That's in the very nature of these affairs.

SOPHIE. Philinchen? A frivolous woman who'd gone through almost everything, and who had no responsibility whatever to herself or to anybody else. And then, when a man plays the same dangerous rôle night after night for a hundred nights, and you are playing opposite him — it's like tempting fate. I saw it coming on the first night, huge, irresistible. After that the only question was at which performance the affair would come to full fruition.

FALK. It was on the ninth. By the twenty fifth it was closed.

SOPHIE. You keep your books accurately, doctor.

FALK. I am half a parent to Herbot. And I assure you, had it lasted longer, I should have substituted another Rautendelein. Entirely on your account, dear Sophie. Because I knew you did mind, in spite of what you say.

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SOPHIE. Mind? Ah no. I understood it. I said to myself: What would happen to you if you played opposite a man like Herbot, night after night? Unfortunately, there is no other like him. I can quite grasp how like incense, like a wild abandon, a nightmare, the feeling would come over one — and then at last one awakes. This forbearance did not come at once. In the throes of my first anguish, I wanted to kill them.

FALK. Both?

SOPHIE [*earnestly*]. Him — at least, him.

FALK. And what about me? Eh? I should have had to put off my play. And a fine chance I'd have, getting on my feet again!

SOPHIE [*laughing involuntarily*]. But how do you explain the fact that, after Herbot, others played the part?

FALK. Later — much later. Before a performance, I warn you, no star is allowed to be murdered. Now you have an inkling of what drawbacks there are in this repertory business. But many thanks for not carrying out your intention. You were wise in thinking better of it, just as now —

SOPHIE. I'm not sure yet whether it's the best thing in this case, though.

FALK. Right after the affair — after that first crisis, I remember quite well that you really became mated for the first time. And you were wonderfully happy. At least until August of this year. And, trust me, you will be happy together again.

SOPHIE. Wonderfully happy?

FALK. Certainly.

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SOPHIE. I don't think so. Even though I've come back, be assured it can never mean happiness again.

FALK. But —

SOPHIE. Only think, doctor, who the favorite is now. A young girl, an innocent young girl about to be married. And her fiancé is a splendid young man who is quite daft about the girl. Besides, he and Herbot are quite friendly. Has anyone the right to jeopardize a third person in an affair of this kind?

FALK. In a higher sense, certainly not. But in the present instance the happiness of a third person is not in peril. The fellow knows absolutely nothing, and the wedding will take place in eight days.

SOPHIE. Oh, that is the least consideration.

FALK. I'm afraid, Sophie, you've been to too many performances of Ibsen at my theatre. Luckily, Herbot has no use for Ibsen and regards the affair as comparatively harmless — not very different from that other one. At that time, it was the case of a young girl of good family too; yes, and she was about to be married. But an affair of this sort doesn't always imply a climax, as you think. With the perplexities of conscience Herbot has no patience. His is much too primitive — let us be frank — his is too wholesome a nature.

SOPHIE. Wholesome? Is that the correct word?

FALK. Really, I never dreamed you'd take the thing so painfully. At first I had no idea when the affair would peter out. They were wrapped

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up in one another and noticed nothing or seemed to notice nothing. Naturally I wondered a bit, and I dare say I had cause to wonder too.

SOPHIE. That's a bit dark, doctor.

FALK. Well, what I mean is that I should certainly have wondered if they had let the thing go on that way, if at the critical moment I had not found them with entanglements elsewhere.

SOPHIE [*smiling*]. Indeed. How you notice everything, dear doctor.

FALK. You don't have to be particularly sharp for that. And I, as an old skillful dramatist, cannot lay the tragic blame at your door.

SOPHIE [*very earnestly*]. Perhaps you are right. But I am not altogether without blame. Otherwise I should not have come back.

FALK. And wouldn't it be much nicer — and here the unmoral casuist puts the question — wouldn't it somewhat relieve the situation if you were likewise — how shall I put it? — caught in a fault?

SOPHIE. Perhaps. Similar thoughts have come to me unaided in my seclusion.

FALK. Similar thoughts occurred to you, and yet you remained alone?

SOPHIE. Do you still doubt that?

FALK. Oh no!

SOPHIE. I don't think you have a true account of the affair to which you allude. And since I feel that you are a friend —

FALK. You have none better —

SOPHIE. Then you ought to know the truth. My truth. Here is a letter which I received from him one hour ago. From him.

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FALK. From him? From the young chap sporting the hunting cap? My chess opponent?

SOPHIE. You referred to him, didn't you? Or did you suspect an escapade with some one else? It's a letter from the young man with whom I seemed to you to be so taken up, emotionally and otherwise, that I allowed the affair between my husband and Daisy to take its natural course. Would you care to read it?

FALK. Typed, is it? No? Oh, you will have to excuse me, Sophie. Read it to me yourself with your dark resonant voice.

SOPHIE. I'll read only a few lines which, I think, will clear up everything for you. Just a minute. [*Turns pages and reads.*] "I have just learnt, dear madam, that you are still in Brioni and as ever, alone. Since you left the Attersee lakeside before me and have not, to my knowledge, arrived at Vienna, it follows that you have not seen your husband for two months." [*Interrupts herself.*] The letter was forwarded to me here. [*Reads further.*] "It is not my intention to force myself into your private affairs, nor to attempt to penetrate what appears a self-chosen reticence. Whatever has happened, whatever your plans are, I must not presume to be concerned any further than you will allow. But, if I may, I should like to remind you of one hour — a wonderful hour on the shore of the lake just before sunset —" A wonderful sunset, while my husband and Daisy and her fiancé were out sailing in the distance.

FALK. Is that what our friend means by "wonderful"? He is undoubtedly referring to

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something that happened between you and him —

SOPHIE. It was the hour when he dared utter his feelings, for the first and only time. No, he didn't utter them. He betrayed them in a quiet but moving way. By kissing my hand! That was all.

FALK. That may be much.

SOPHIE. At all events, you must admit, that my transgression was very slight.

FALK. All the more praiseworthy, because he's such a handsome, clean-cut fellow. I've rarely gotten along with anybody so well. His personality gives out a kind of wood smell. I welcome an unliterary chap like that as a god-send. I'll bet he never wrote a play in his life.

SOPHIE. Ah, yes. They've something original to offer, these simple good people who are no geniuses.

FALK. Good. What a word! That wonderful hour on the shore of the lake — I'm inclined to think it depended entirely on you and the good —

SOPHIE. You don't know him, if you say that. Even at that moment his intentions were — well, honorable. Just as they are now. And he clears himself, as you will see, in the letter. Let me read the ending. [*She turns the pages.*]

FALK. You're skipping a good deal.

SOPHIE [*reading*]. "Just the same — I am just as I was in the summer. When you need a friend, call on me or, better still, come yourself —"

FALK. Come yourself?

SOPHIE. Listen to the rest. [*Reads.*] "My

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life belongs to you. I am all alone and absolutely free. If you are free too, Frau Sophie, as free as I suppose you to be —”

FALK [*brusquely*]. His conjecture is wrong, quite wrong. Have you written him so?

SOPHIE. The letter came only an hour ago.

FALK. “Come yourself.” Not bad, that. The fellow seems daft about inviting everybody to his hunting-lodge at Klein-Reifling.

SOPHIE. Everybody?

FALK. Yes. He’s invited me this summer. “If,” said he, “you’d care to get away from the theatrical groove, come out to Klein-Reifling. Wonderful country, you know. We can play chess every evening. You don’t have to shoot deer, if you don’t care to.” I don’t suppose he asked you to shoot, either, Sophie.

SOPHIE [*dropping the letter*]. Ah, how stupid we are! Why are we humans created with the power to ruin the lives of people who are innocent and who don’t understand the meaning of it all?

FALK. Understand? Can’t Herbot charge you with a want of understanding? Was he as bad as you make him out? Does he bother about the happiness of others? What are other people to him? To him who is accustomed always to play the leading part? Supernumeraries — people who never get a curtain call and die ingloriously behind the scenes! You can do no wrong to such people when you’re composed of heroic stuff yourself — What is it?

SOPHIE. He—he is coming. I hear his footstep and my heart’s going pit-a-pat, like

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a young girl's. Oh, it's sheer faint-heartedness.

FALK. On the contrary. It's just as it should be.

[*Conrad Herbot enters. He is a man of about 45 with dark curly hair and a pair of grey-striped black eyes. He is wearing an overcoat and hat.*]

HERBOT. Good evening. [Slaps Falk on the shoulder.] Well, what do you say, old chap? Now I'm at home, as it were, even though this happens to be — for the time being — nothing better than a room in a hotel. [Pats Sophie's cheek.] Good evening, dear. [To Falk.] She's looking extremely well, isn't she? And pretty too? Let me tell you, it's quite cozy now that she's come back.

FALK. I second that.

HERBOT. The last few hours have brought me back to my old self quite remarkably, and it's almost as if it had never been otherwise. The two months are dead and forgotten. Hola! Hola!

SOPHIE. But I was away, wasn't I? You speak now as the Berliners do.

HERBOT [*removing his overcoat*]. Of course. Of all things, she can't bear that. [Exaggerating the Viennese accent.] Goin' to be good from now on, little dearie?

FALK. Well, I'll leave you two together — newly-weds just home from church.

SOPHIE. Won't you stay for a cup of coffee?

FALK. Thanks. I really can't stay any longer. [Sophie rings.]

HERBOT. Are you leaving us again so soon?

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FALK. I've been here an hour already.  
Where have you been gadding about at this hour?

HERBOT [*glancing at the clock*]. Good Heavens, it's (half past six) already. Ah, but there's a great fascination in walking about the streets when you know there's someone at home waiting for you.

FALK. Only, as I remember, it wasn't quite fascinating for the person who had to wait. Well, see you later at the theatre. [*To Sophie*.] I've kept your box for you. Outside of that the house is all sold out.

HERBOT. A work of art!

FALK. Goodbye.

HERBOT. Now that you're here, I want to reiterate that you don't pay me half the salary that's coming to me. So long! Will you be in the box too?

FALK. On one condition: that you will play your part with some degree of intelligence.

HERBOT. You villain! In honor of this glorious day, suppose we drop into the Kannenberg after the play and open a pottle of Sec —

SOPHIE. Conrad!

HERBOT. What — is it, my dear? Oh, alright. [*Mimicking the Viennese*.] Let's have some suds instead and a plate of goulash. Eh? What do you say to that?

FALK. That depends on Sophie.

[*Waiter enters, receives orders from Sophie and goes out.*]

HERBOT [*catching sight of the manuscript*]. What's that?

FALK. The play I spoke about this morning.

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HERBOT. Another? Thank God Sophie's here at least. My vacation, I perceive, is over at last. I have about a half dozen of them over there. Believe me, Falk, I tried my hardest to look through one and then another; and the result is a brain-storm.

FALK. Did you ever hear anything like it?  
[To Sophie.] The foremost names in the German dramatic world.

HERBOT. Well, I should like awfully to say something straight out to you, Falk. To me every play at the reading seems pure twaddle. And in the majority of cases I am right. As a matter of fact, with many, when you see them on the stage —

FALK. With Conrad Herbot in the leading part.

HERBOT. That never did hurt any play. Doubtless you sometimes feel as I do, that all this theatrical clap-trap is the merest flummery. Backdrop and wings! The curtain goes up and the curtain goes down, and nine times out of ten the fellow who trafficks on the boards is a black-guard of the —

FALK. Leave him alone.

HERBOT. Upon my word, we're the most paradoxical people in the world, we actor-folk. In private life, I grant you quite rational — quite. Then we strike a pose behind the footlights and mouth some bit got by rote, just as if we meant it in all seriousness. We enter and we exist and out front the audience sit gaping and whispering behind their palms. Incredible! That they should fall for such a thing. Do you know what

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I think at times? That this so-called art of the theatre is simply an invention of the box-office.

FALK. A powerful and eke a profound observation!

HERBOT. True, isn't it? And yet if the public were informed of this fact, it would ruin your business, wouldn't it? Well, for the time being I'm going to keep it to myself; but some day, I don't mind telling you, I'm going to write an article to this tune — when the time is ripe — It would make a splendid Christmas supplement. The public's very fond of that sort of thing.

FALK. You'd better wait a bit, that is, until you've stopped drawing a salary. Next year perhaps or the year after.

HERBOT. Oh yes, that would suit you to a dot. You want to lay by a pile meanwhile. Well, good luck to you, if you can do it. Oh, and by the way, if there's going to be a raft of junk cluttering the doorway of my dressing room the same as yesterday, during *Tasso*, I'll raise such a rumpus —

FALK. And if you fill your dressing room with cigarette smoke again, I'll give you two weeks' notice —

HERBOT. Just what I'm waiting for. Then I'll be able to lead a normal life for the rest of my days. Lying at ease on the grass and gazing up at the blue sky, or with a gun plopping through the meadows and the fertile fields —

FALK. With a gun?

HERBOT. Certainly. It's not a bad substitute for the stage.

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FALK. Did my chess opponent, the fellow with the green hat, invite you too?

HERBOT. Herr von Bolschau. Of course he did.

FALK. It's an obsession with him.

HERBOT. Charming fellow, Bolschau is. Ask Sophie. She likes him too. Isn't that so, dear? [*In Berlinese.*] We know whom to like and whom not to like, don't we, my dear?

FALK. I won't let you go. You've no business in Klein-Reifling. Well, auf wiedersehen. I invite myself to your box, Sophie. [*Goes.*]

HERBOT. What a soul that man has! In our last contract I fell beautifully for him. Well, he'll have to shell out or I sail for America. On this side they pay starvation salaries. Well, Sophie [*drawing her to him*], here we are together again. But tell me, please. Did you intend to leave me for good?

SOPHIE. Here I am, back again. So let's not talk about it. Let's forget it.

HERBOT. Oh, if one only could! You've no idea what I suffered while you were away. I wasn't myself at all. I walked about as in a dream — as in an evil dream. And I played comedy parts like a swine. Not always — but most of the time.

SOPHIE. Yes, that's exactly what Falk says.

HERBOT. What? The impudence! I was all right for I don't know how long. I was good enough, even for the public. Too good! You should penetrate the man first. For a measly hundred marks he'd cut his throat. But they're all the same, every one of them. He's spread-

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ing the rumor about that I'm going back home. But nobody believes him. They have eyes and ears, thank Heaven! The public is mine. Now, and for a long time to come. And more than ever, now — now that you have come back — now, believe me. Without you I am lost. That's the truth. I should have given up the legitimate stage and gone into vaudeville. In vaudeville there's a better chance to travel and, on the whole, it pays better. [The waiter brings tea, pastry and sets the tea-table.]

HERBOT. I'll tell you what: In February I'm going to take time out and we'll go to the Riviera. I won't accept your "no." By God, I've earned it. Since the time I was a boy I've longed to go there, and today I am 43. Connected almost twenty seven years with the theatre. Twenty seven. "At the age of sixteen, a mere youngster, he ran away" — but you know the rest. [Waiter goes out.]

SOPHIE [pouring tea]. Until today I've been unable to find out from whom you ran away. Your parents were reconciled to the idea of your going on the stage.

HERBOT. Why, of course. You see, at the age of 14, I acted all kinds of parts at home. "The late lamented actor by appointment at the Hoftheatre at Bayreuth, Herr Story, who in the youngster devoted to Thespis —" and so on. [Notices the card.] Who is Vilma Flamm?

SOPHIE. Vilma Flamm is a young lady.

HERBOT. What kind of a young lady?

SOPHIE. A young artiste with whom you had an engagement here.

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HERBOT. An engagement?

SOPHIE. You were going to see if she had any talent. She wrote you eight days ago.

HERBOT. Oh yes, the little goose! I hope you speedily showed her the door.

SOPHIE. Of course. But you had an appointment with her.

HERBOT. Not unlikely. You know sometimes one replies and sometimes one doesn't. Was anybody else here?

SOPHIE. Not today.

HERBOT. Well, if that sort come, just put them out. You have *plein pouvoir*. I don't give try-outs, I do not instruct. I do not write in autograph albums. On the other hand, it may have been a blackmailer. I'll be hanged if I can remember the name of Vilma Flamm. [They sit at the tea-table.]

SOPHIE. You always had a poor memory.

HERBOT. You don't expect me to have a memory for such things. Just consider what I must cram into my head, as it is. The godlike words of the master creations of our great poets — and all that modern rot, besides. Naturally there's hardly any room for anything else.

SOPHIE. For nothing at all?

HERBOT. To be quite frank, the function is under my control. I remember and I forget, just as it pleases me. And I assure you, Sophie — I know what's passing through your mind now — if I should casually meet a certain lady in the street, I'd cut her without a moment's hesitation. I should not recognize her at all. If I should attempt to recall her features, it would be in vain.

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She is a shadow, a ghost, your old grandmother,  
if you like.

SOPHIE [*bursting out*]. How could you do it?

HERBOT. Yes, how could I do it?

SOPHIE. Her fiancé was your friend.

HERBOT. Not friend; hardly that. Still, I confess, it was a rascally thing to do. And, being aware of that, I was amply prepared to pay the price.

SOPHIE. You were — when were you prepared?

HERBOT. That very morning, Sophie. When I returned home from her arms — I beg your pardon — and found you gone and your farewell note. Those terrible words! When I realized that I had lost you — lost you for ever, do you know what agony I suffered? I resolved then to go to him, confess what a scoundrel I was and frankly tell him that I had betrayed my wife and seduced his fiancée — and so on. For hours and hours in the early morning dusk I wandered along the river-bank and fought a terrific struggle with myself, until I saw that I dared not do it. If only for the sake of Daisy's family. But they were gloomy days to bear, Sophie, those last five days in our country villa — and perhaps the greatest ordeal of all was the need of lying, the need of going on lying.

SOPHIE. You mean — ?

HERBOT. Well, you see I had to find some plausible excuse for your sudden departure. And so in my desperation, I invented the yarn of a drain bursting in our Berlin apartment. Oh, I sketched in the details — details, whole letters

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from you, humorous turns of expression. Can you imagine it! In this way I had to drag on my life, on my lips a drain burst and in my heart — death. Yes, dearest, it was by no means easy to live out the day as if nothing had happened; taking your morning bath as before, eating breakfast, sailing —

SOPHIE. As if nothing had happened. Both day and night.

HERBOT. Sophie, upon my word, on that day when you went away I was done with —

SOPHIE. Don't pledge your word. Oaths are not necessary in reference to the past. The past is buried, dead and buried.

HERBOT. Yes, buried a long time ago.

SOPHIE. But the future, that belongs to us, if you are willing.

HERBOT. If I am willing? If I am — Sophie, dear!

SOPHIE. And I beg of you, Conrad, above all things be truthful. It is the one thing I demand of you. I can understand everything. I can forgive everything. Only, I beg of you, don't put on the comic spirit. Don't — in my presence. It isn't necessary. Everything which you have just said, was not you. There was an occasional gleam which shone through your mask, but you — your inmost self — it was not that; that *you*, I mean, which abides in the recesses of self, very deep within. And I cannot resist the feeling that that which you are is somehow good — somehow — and on that I place my trust. You've only got to believe in it yourself. Deep in the beginnings of your con-

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sciousness, I feel — oh so vividly — that you are a mere child, nothing but a child. So —

HERBOT. A child? There may be a good deal in what you say. I have something to confess to you, Sophie. Whenever I start introspecting or dreaming about myself, I invariably see myself not as a somewhat mature person with iron grey hair, but rather as a small boy who is always being led by the hand of somebody, by his father or his tutor, though, to be sure, I never had a tutor. I'm quite amazed sometimes — but you must promise me not to let this go further — that people talk to me as if I were quite rational and wholly grown-up; while I feel an irresistible impulse to say to them, "Please let me be. I can't make head or tail of your twaddle. By nature I am alien to your confidence." Yes indeed, Sophie, that was a singularly apt observation — I am a child. [*A knock is heard.*] Who the deuce can that be? Come in. [*Enter boy with card.*]

HERBOT [*ignoring it*]: I am not at home. [*Reads the card and starts.*] Eh?

SOPHIE. What is it? [*Takes the card out of his hand.*] Edgar Gley — Edgar —

HERBOT. You heard what I said. I am not at home to any one. I play tonight and I am busy.

SOPHIE. You must see him, Herbot.

HERBOT. Must? I don't see that.

SOPHIE [*to the Bell-hop*]. Wait a minute.

HERBOT. Where is the gentleman waiting?

BELL-HOP. In the lobby, sir.

SOPHIE [*under her breath to Herbot*]. You

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can't avoid this interview. The sooner it is over, the better.

HERBOT. Show the gentleman in. [Bell-hop goes.]

SOPHIE [*anxiously and quite earnestly*]. Conrad —

HERBOT. What is it? Certainly it shows lack of consideration just before *Hamlet*. [Walking back and forth.]

SOPHIE. Are you sure you haven't heard from him since?

HERBOT. I've told you, haven't I? Not for two months — it's quite incredible that he should suspect anything. It can't be about her.

SOPHIE. How does he come to be here, in Berlin? She's in Vienna. Last we heard of him he was in Villach attached to the governor's suite — and suddenly he is here.

HERBOT. On furlough, no doubt. After all, Berlin's a rather interesting city —

SOPHIE. Are you sure you weren't imprudent? You must have climbed through her window at night. Someone must have seen you —

HERBOT. Certainly not he. Otherwise he'd have paid me a visit before today.

SOPHIE. Nonsense! This once I give you leave to lie.

HERBOT. Thanks for the privilege. You can trust me when it comes to that. But now suppose you go into the salon. If you should stay within hearing, I might — and I want unlimited freedom. If I felt that you were eavesdropping, I'd be uncertain about myself. Now —

SOPHIE [*anxiously*]. Conrad —

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HERBOT. Be at rest, dearest. [He caresses her hair. As he is about to draw her close to him, she fends him off gently and goes into the adjoining room. For a space he remains motionless, then takes up the discarded manuscript, turns the pages idly and at length lights a cigarette. Growing perceptibly impatient, he rises, goes to the door on the right and listens. There is a knock. He tiptoes noiselessly back into the centre of the room and pretends to be absorbed in reading the manuscript. There is a second knock.]

HERBOT. Come in. [Edgar Gley enters.]

EDGAR. Good evening.

HERBOT. Good evening, Mr. Gley. I'm delighted to see you, even though this be only an hotel apartment.

EDGAR. I don't wish to keep you long, Mr. Herbot.

HERBOT. You know I play tonight.

EDGAR. I know.

HERBOT. I have about a quarter of an hour to spare. Won't you take a seat? My wife will regret missing —

EDGAR [slightly taken aback]. Your wife — is here?

HERBOT. Of course. Where then should she be? She went away for a couple of weeks — Ah, you know our apartment was in a terrible mess. You remember, don't you? I believe I told you about it — a drain burst. Tomorrow or the day after tomorrow it will be in shipshape again. The place was almost flooded. Quite a bother, let me tell you. And ten thousand marks'

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damage at the very lowest estimate. When everything is repaired, we will entertain as before. I regret most of all the loss of several irreplaceable specimens of handwriting. I am, as you are aware, a collector of ancient examples of handwriting. Are you interested in that sort of thing? [Edgar starts to speak but restrains himself as if lacking courage.]

HERBOT [*noticing the effort*]. But I see I'm boring you about myself and my affairs. How is your fiancée? I presume you've just come from Vienna.

EDGAR. No, straight from Villach. I have something to ask you, Mr. Herbot. Please answer "yes" or "no." Were you Daisy's lover?

HERBOT [*rising*]. I—? Mr. Gley, I'm afraid I do not follow you. What evil-minded—slander-monger—

EDGAR. It is quite obvious that you must take this stand. But it is equally obvious that nothing is proved by your disavowal. [Herbot is about to interrupt.] Your word of honor proves nothing either.

HERBOT. Unfortunately a man has nothing outside his word of honor which he can call his own. There are people who would be satisfied with Conrad Herbot's mere word of honor.

EDGAR. In a matter of this sort, do you think? Unfortunately I'm not in a position to—

HERBOT. Well, at all events, will you tell me from what source you got your information? Will you be good enough to show me the anonymous letter? I shall soon prove to you—

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EDGAR. Let's not trifl about that. I ask you again: Were you Daisy's lover?

HERBOT. Since you don't care to reveal the source of this brazen — no, the grounds of your libellous suspicion; and since you make it impossible for me to defend, frankly to deny the charge, I therefore propose to you, Mr. Gley, that we leave the young woman entirely out of the discussion and confine ourselves to the simple fact that my nose is an eyesore to you. I promise you that I shall feel as injured as you please and — we will arrange to meet in one of those delightful little glades yonder!

EDGAR. Mr. Herbot, I don't feel disposed to doubt your mood and, I take it, there is no question about mine. Don't let's go through a scene of high-sounding words. Mr. Herbot, we want, if possible,— and to me it is possible — to talk like two men — no, let alone every vanity and every question of honor in the accepted sense, like two human beings. I ask you for the last time, Mr. Herbot, please to abandon the manner you have assumed thus far. I don't for a moment question the correctness of it. But please understand that a human being confronts you now, Mr. Herbot, one who demands nothing but the truth, whatever it may be. You follow me, Mr. Herbot? One who, however poignant it may be, is ready to bear it. Understand me, please, Mr. Herbot, I come neither in the guise of a fool nor as an avenger to one who is either a knave or who has been unjustly so accused. Human to human! If it fell out as I suspect, Mr. Herbot, it probably was no dastardly

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act. If otherwise, then it wasn't very far from it. But no matter what has happened, nothing in the world could force us to face one another with pistols so that one of us might — [Herbot starts to speak.]

EDGAR. Not yet. You're going to go on lying, I suppose. But please listen to what I have to say. I have lived through many things — I know what a mere fragrance, what the perfume of summer evenings can do with us. I know, too, how far behind us we can thrust our lot like a dream which has been told as a tale by a stranger. And I know that I am prepared to endure anything, except uncertainty. I can forgive everything but lies. See how easy the truth is made for you! I trust you are beginning to understand. Or do you suspect perhaps that I am laying a trap for you, unawares. I have, I think, surrendered myself completely into your hands, Mr. Herbot. I've stood here like the most pitiful clown. If I had wanted to take advantage of your confession and entrap you and then to reassume the affronted bridegroom; if this were so, you would be at liberty to deny me all satisfaction, spit in my face for, whatever you may have done, I should have been viler than you by far. Can you hesitate still, Mr. Herbot? Never, I feel, has one man spoken to another as I have done to you. Were you Daisy's lover? You are silent? You must speak. You must speak the truth, before it is too late. Yes, Mr. Herbot, before it is too late. For should I casually learn the truth later — and things of this sort are known to exist; there are such things as

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belated confessions by women — then I won't fight a duel with you, then I'd strike you down like a —

HERBOT. Stop. Go no further. I — I am at your disposal. Yes, at your disposal? There is no way out of this for you or me.

EDGAR. Then you were Daisy's —

HERBOT. I was not. And yet one of us must die.

EDGAR. The truth! The truth! Mr. Herbot.

HERBOT. What are words — ? Now if someone had predicted — I beg your pardon, I can't say more. [He goes to the window apparently moved. However, unobserved of Edgar he steals a glance at the clock. For a space he remains standing at the window.]

EDGAR. Speak out, Mr. Herbot.

HERBOT [turning toward him again]. Child of man, how simple the world appears to you! Yes and no; truth and falsehood; faith and deception. Oh, if it were only as simple as that, young fr — Mr. Gley. But it is not as simple as that. By Heaven, if I were of your mould, it would be the easiest thing in the world, in order to set your troubled mind at rest, to answer your question exactly as you've asked it. Yes, it would be the easiest thing in the world if somebody else had come instead of you — you, Edgar Gley, who have been a stranger to me until now. If somebody else had come — one of the dozens of commonplace folk whose life does not touch mine, I should have let him go back to the banal world whence he came. To him I might say —

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no, swear that nothing happened. But, at the risk of your calling me inhuman, I cannot answer you that way. For it would be the most cowardly of lies. It would be one of those lies one could swear to before the law. And behind it all, there would still be something unsaid, simple yet different — confoundedly simple, don't you know? And that would be to answer: It happened, Mr. Gley. Daisy was my mistress — and then to take you at your word, to dismiss you and exult that the way is clear and to flatter myself again with hope, like an old fool, that now that the young chap, the lover, the fiancé is out of the way, the impossible will come to pass. And one's maddest wish would be granted. And can you be certain that you will not be up to these damnable tricks when you're not over-clever. You don't perceive, fool that you are, that the dream cannot last; that it must perish with disillusionment, regret and denunciation. Well, Edgar Gley, I loved your fiancé. I adored her. I wanted to break away from my wife. I loved Daisy — like a schoolboy. I didn't keep my love a secret from her. I wrote verses to her — old Herbot, mind you, wrote verses, paced back and forth under her window, stole softly into her garden, threw his tender billets-doux, like Romeo, through the window — [*Pauses suddenly as if something had just occurred to him.*] Ah, now I see everything. Someone must have seen me. Someone must have spied me one night in the garden or perhaps in the wherry directly opposite the house. But who can it have been? You've received anonymous letters: admit it.

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EDGAR. That's unimportant. Go on.

HERBOT. What else do you want to know?

EDGAR. You made love to Daisy — and she quietly let you.

HERBOT. Let me — I can't deny it.

EDGAR. Read your letters? [Herbot smiles.] And replied to them? Please answer.

HERBOT. You will not begrudge me that, Mr. Gley.

EDGAR. I am sorry.

HERBOT [*with the express purpose of discounting the truth of the words he is about to utter*]. I possess nothing in writing —

EDGAR. Mr. Herbot, lies are lies. If you seek to mislead me regarding a minor detail, how do I know that the rest also —

HERBOT. Don't persist in that belief. Let's break off right here.

EDGAR. Impossible.

HERBOT. Well, then, there's nothing else I can do. Do as you please, Mr. Gley. I am entirely at your disposal —

EDGAR. You've gone too far to hold back now. I promise you that no one will learn the gist of this conversation — not even my fiancée. Don't torture me any longer. You have my word of honor.

HERBOT [*after a rapid pause, rummages in his pocket and extracts a letter*]. Here's a letter from Daisy to me. [After an involuntary start of Edgar's.] Allow me to read it. Later you can verify whether I have omitted a syllable. But it must be heard in the proper tone, other-

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wise it might be misunderstood. [Reads.] "Conrad Herbot, I beg of you, go away."

EDGAR. When was this written?

HERBOT [*showing date*]. August 27th, A. M. [Reads.] "Don't bring unhappiness to people who have never wronged you. Do not forget, Conrad Herbot, what you've meant to me long before I ever knew you. Let that suffice. When I see you again on the stage in one of your glorious—" Ah, let's skip that. "Never has a man of your sort—" Rather poignant, this! Miss Daisy simply means that she's never had a man, about whom she used to read in the papers, make love to her. And so and so on. But please listen carefully. [Reads.] "Remember that you have a fascinating wife who loves you and that I am engaged to one who loves me dearly and whose love I return. Yes, Conrad Herbot, I love him and I will never love anybody else. But you, Conrad Herbot, are perilous—that's the only way I can express it. Sometimes I feel as if I hate you. I implore you to go away—please go away."

EDGAR [*taking the letter*]. On the 27th and you went away—?

HERBOT. Several hours later.

EDGAR. And if you had stayed—?

HERBOT. Mr. Gley, I might have stayed without harm. Through this letter I first grew aware of my "perilousness" so called. Until then—

EDGAR. But you yourself just said that you intended to—

HERBOT. Uproot you from Daisy's heart? Yes. I don't deny it. I was a fool. This let-

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ter brought me to my senses with a shock. "I will never love anybody else."

EDGAR. But she wavered. This letter proves it beyond a doubt. She wavered between you and me. And it depended altogether on you —

HERBOT [*interrupting*]. I'd believe that too, if I were still the fool today I was for about half an hour. She's always been yours. But when it comes to fame — Ah, my young friend, you've no idea what a pretty dance that leads a young girl's heart? We never know, we poor mortals, whether it is genuine passion or simply the fragrance of immortality wafting about us. Quite frankly, I envy the men who have never had to doubt whether they were loved for themselves alone. Were I not Conrad Herbot, but the same as any other man — a landed proprietor from Klein-Reifling, for instance, — doubtless I should have appeared ridiculous to your fiancée. But Conrad Herbot went daft about her — and that touched her a bit. She realized quite clearly that she was Conrad Herbot's last love, and I suppose a moment came when she almost believed the emotion to be love. She's not the first who's felt that way. But guilty — if I may mention the word in the same breath with all this — I was guilty, I alone. It would never have gone as far as it did, not even up to the letters, if I'd been able to conceal my feelings. But that was beyond me. Like a fatality it swept over me.

EDGAR. You intended to leave your wife, you said a moment ago. She went away before you —

HERBOT [*cutting in quickly*]. Not on account

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of the pipe-leak. You may rest assured of that. She went away because I was unable to cover up the true state of my emotions. I kept no secrets from her. She's a wonderful woman. Directly upon receiving this letter and my flight from Daisy, I told her all about it. I begged her to come to me, to stand by me, to rescue me from utter despair. But she thought it unworthy to live with me so long as my heart was given to another. She wanted to come back only when I could write to her with a peaceful conscience that the last embers were extinguished. Three days ago I found that I could write her that. She's been here since yesterday, and tomorrow old Herbot will be in his home again.

EDGAR. Why didn't she tell me all this?

HERBOT. Can't you really guess, Mr. Gley, how near she was to doing it? How often the confession surged to her lips? I — I have seen it. Thank God, it's turned out differently. It would have been a terrible awakening for us all.

EDGAR. Why was she silent?

HERBOT. Shall I tell you? Because, possessing an instinct of refinement, she knew that that which externally appeared to you in the light of a confession was in reality a bald-faced lie. She never loved me, Mr. Gley. That must be apparent to you. Never. And I venture that you, Mr. Gley, may go through the wedding ceremony with a more beautiful sense of security than many another young fellow who, as the saying is, has nothing with which to reproach his fiancée. Miss Daisy, as it were, has had her escapade. And, I am sure, that the day will come when she'll

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tell it to you herself. She will tell it to you even before you lead her to the altar. And, if you wish to oblige me, wait until then. Don't broach the subject yourself. [Seeing Edgar is silent.] How absurd of me! Of course you won't be able to keep your lips locked that long. Of course you're going to tell her everything. You'll tell her that I showed you the letter too —

EDGAR [*after cursorily glancing through it again, flings it into the fire.*] Never, as sure as you see it burning to ashes! Of this letter nothing shall be said. And nothing shall be said of this visit of mine.

HERBOT. Don't promise too much, Mr. Gley.

EDGAR [*looks at him*]. I promise no more than I think I can keep. Goodby, Mr. Herbot.

HERBOT. You've something else to ask me, Mr. Gley?

EDGAR [*staring straight at him a long time*]. Nothing whatever. [*Impulsively extending his hand.*]

HERBOT [*almost genuinely*]. Be good to her, Mr. Gley. Please be good to her. [Edgar goes.]

[*Herbot returns from the door with a serious expression at first, then a self-satisfied but not quite frivolous smile flits across his face. He glances at the clock. He makes a gesture indicating that there's ample time yet. Rings. Bell-hop enters.*]

HERBOT. Will you please ask my wife to come up? She's in the lobby. [Bell-hop goes out. Sophie comes in from the left.]

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HERBOT [*turning round and catching sight of her*]. Oh! you were —

SOPHIE. Yes, all the time.

HERBOT. But you promised me — Ah, I understand. Perhaps it's better so. I hope you are satisfied.

SOPHIE. Quite.

HERBOT. It wasn't easy, I assure you. At the outset I was seized with something like a first-night nervous fit. Though I wasn't unprepared. I was weak at the beginning.

SOPHIE. Well, you carried it off —

HERBOT. But didn't it come a cropper as I went along? You thought it quite different, dearest, didn't you? That I'd disavow everything? But only fools disavow, sane people —

SOPHIE. Lie.

HERBOT. Lie? No, Sophie, don't think it was unadulterated falsehood. Part of it was true. That's the rare thing about it: the way the truth was interwoven with the falsehood. That's why it looked so plausible. Well, thank Heaven, we can breathe freely again.

SOPHIE. You think —? Have you forgotten already? Suppose he should by chance learn the truth later — you know what he threatened to do. And he will learn the truth. It's only deferred.

HERBOT. Nonsense! He'll never get at the truth. That's quite sure.

SOPHIE. Sure? He'll talk to me. Don't fool yourself about that. And I daresay contradictions will crop up.

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HERBOT. Contradictions? Why?

SOPHIE. Especially in the story about the letter. How will you explain away the trumped-up letter?

HERBOT. Trumped-up? It was real.

SOPHIE. The letter was real—?

HERBOT. Certainly it was. Daisy actually wrote it. But not on the 27th of August. On the 2nd. It was a simple matter to interpolate the 7.

SOPHIE. I don't quite understand.

HERBOT. But, sweetheart, it's quite a simple matter. The contingency of some chatter-box gassing about us had to be taken into consideration. It seemed likely that an anonymous letter or something of the sort would come up. And so I arranged with Daisy what we would do if something like that happened. It was evident that a bare denial would not clear the air. And so this occurred to us to pull us through.

SOPHIE. Ah, indeed. Very clever. Now I'm beginning to understand —

HERBOT. And the letter — I read it beautifully, did I not? It seemed as if created for the purpose — how shall I put it? — just to serve us with an alibi.

SOPHIE. Extraordinary.

HERBOT. There are no other letters. Nor any other evidence of any shape. And, you may be sure, that Daisy will take care of her end of the affair.

SOPHIE. We hope so. But I don't think she'll come any way near you in that.

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HERBOT. Maybe better. A girl of her sort — Trust women for that. They're born with the instinct. But, aside from that, don't you think he was capital?

SOPHIE. He?

HERBOT. Edgar Gley. Surely he had the easier task. But shall I tell you something in confidence, Sophie? There were moments when I was literally swept along and little else was needed that I should have believed the whole story myself.

SOPHIE. What story?

HERBOT. Oh, you overheard it. Somewhere near the close of the scene. It seemed as if nothing, absolutely nothing had existed between the girl and myself. It was like a stroke of genius, you might say. [*Falk comes in wearing his over-coat and carrying his hat in his hand.*]

FALK. Are you out of your mind? Here it is a quarter to seven! What's the matter?

HERBOT. Do you think it takes me an hour to get into Hamlet's togs?

FALK. Paragraph seven: "All performers in the current production must be in their dressing rooms —" Besides, the crown prince is going to be present.

HERBOT. Really, and the princess?

FALK. And suite.

HERBOT. Now, Sophie, what do you say to that? I can still draw the best people to the stalls even though he's about disgusted them with his tomfoolery. Haven't you gone and raised the price of seats? Later on over a pottle of Sec we'll talk seriously about the terms of my new con-

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tract. Particularly the clause referring to my leave of absence. In February we intend taking a trip to the Riviera. Isn't that so, Sophie?

FALK. Are you or are you not going to —

HERBOT. Well, Sophie, get ready as quickly as you can. Today I'm going to play only for you. As far as I am concerned, let his Majesty or the Lord be present.

FALK. I'll bet you wouldn't be a bit surprised if the Lord came to Berlin expressly to witness your Hamlet.

HERBOT. If he came, he'd get a ticket to Reinhardt's. Don't you think so?

FALK. In any case, it would be in the papers.

HERBOT [*quickly caressing Sophie on the cheek and kissing her forehead*]. Addio. A rivederci! [Takes his hat and overcoat and goes out.]

FALK. He's in fine spirits. You're not quite as gay. You stand there for all the world like a piece of sculpture. What's the matter? Scenes? Again?

SOPHIE [*motionless*]. No, never again. Everything's at an end.

FALK [*after a brief pause*]. Well, aren't you going to dress for the theatre? Auf wiedersehen.

SOPHIE. I'm not going to the theatre. I'm leaving.

FALK. What do you mean?

SOPHIE. Tonight — in an hour. Everything is over and done with.

FALK. What's the matter?

SOPHIE. I can't tell you in a word.

FALK. Oh, I don't want to appear too press-

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ing. I can do without the scene with the ghost, with Hamlet's father I mean. But, if you still regard me as a friend —

SOPHIE. Why should I? [After a short pause.] Edgar Gley was here.

FALK. Oh!

SOPHIE. He wanted an explanation. My husband gave it to him. I was in the next room the whole time? I overheard everything.

FALK. Well?

SOPHIE. I never suspected a man could lie that way.

FALK. Did you think —? You ought to be glad.

SOPHIE. The whole thing was preconcerted and planned between him and the girl. They anticipated it. And my husband told the young fellow a story about his being daft about the girl and that she was indifferent to his attentions. And the truth is, he visited her night after night by scaling the window.

FALK. Well, you couldn't expect him to tell Mr. Gley that, could you? It's much better to lie artfully in these affairs than not at all.

SOPHIE. You should have heard it. And he suspected nothing and was quite happy about it. Oh, if you had heard it you would now understand why it's impossible for me to live one day longer, no, one hour with this man —

FALK. But where are you going?

SOPHIE. How should I know? Away — away.

FALK. Don't you really know?

SOPHIE. What?

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FALK. Where you want to run away to. Or do you imagine —

SOPHIE. If it were as you insinuate, do you think I would have needed a subterfuge to go? I am going to no one! I simply want to go away, and I want to be alone — for the rest of my life alone.

FALK. That'll never do. You must return in two weeks. I can't give you a longer leave of absence than that. Our contract —

SOPHIE. How can you jest about it? Don't you understand? It is over and done with forever. Nothing remains, nothing but nausea, no, horror, an overwhelming horror of it all. How can I go back to him? One can go back to a man when he has failed miserably, when he has committed a crime, when he's wounded somebody unto death; one can go back to one who is repentant and to one who is not repentant. But a man must recognize what he's done. Herbot doesn't recognize it. He doesn't understand me and he doesn't understand himself and he doesn't understand anybody else. Love, hypocrisy, murder, everything which pervades reality is of no greater moment to him than if he were playing one of his parts. He and I speak different tongues, and there is no longer an interpreting medium between us. If, from the depths of my despair I were to throw myself out of the window, it would merely be the end of an act for him. The curtain falls and he goes out for his "pottle of Sec." A human being — he? A maddened harlequin, rather, who when occasion serves is also ready to play the human being. But no human being he —

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no — [*Sinks exhausted on the divan with her face buried in her hands.*]

FALK. Too bad. Too bad.

SOPHIE. Oh, your pity is superfluous now.

FALK. But, dear lady, it needn't remain this way. How differently would this scene have touched you which he seems to have gone through with Mr. Gley, how little horrible, how much gayer, how glorious even would the scamp have appeared to you —

SOPHIE. If I had been worthy of him.

FALK. Naturally, you realize, that will never be — can never be. In this case you remained the same Sophie throughout. One always remains the same. But you should have taken things in a lighter vein. Your incredible respectability is what brings the false note into your relation with Herbot. And carrying, as you do, this weight of respectability, you know in your heart that it can not help matters. If, for instance, you were married to a man of the type of Mr. Gley, a gentleman,— to betray, as the phrase is, that sort of chap is indeed a detestable thing, because in the mind of the Mr. Gleys of the world an act of betrayal is tremendously significant, undeserved and degrading. And very often it may drive the Mr. Gleys of the world to suicide. With the Herbots it's another matter entirely. The Herbots pretend not to notice it. They pretend it even to themselves. Somehow they soon recover.

SOPHIE. You speak like a sophist of the first water.

FALK. Only in the capacity of theatrical director, I assure you.

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SOPHIE [*smiling*]. As regards theatrical matters, I am, from now on, an outsider. Pardon me, I must pack. I don't want him to find me here.

FALK. Seriously, are you leaving — today? Impossible.

SOPHIE. Quite possible, believe me.

FALK. But what am I to say to him?

SOPHIE. Tell him I was too affected by his scene with Mr. Gley to stomach Hamlet into the bargain.

FALK. He'll never accept that.

SOPHIE. Well, then, tell him the truth — that — I —

FALK. Love him.

SOPHIE. No, that I hate him. And that I will never — not as long as I live —

FALK. Hush! No oaths. One should never burn one's bridges behind one. You see, one is put in a very embarrassing position trying to rebuild them.

SOPHIE [*crossing over to the left*]. Goodbye.

FALK. I don't want to keep you back any longer. Good luck, only if you were to ask my advice, don't run away to utter solitude, but to something else —

SOPHIE. Really, you are —

FALK. You're not forced to do anything, not even to come back, if you don't care to. You can stay there. Perhaps that spells your lucky star. Ah, look down, Sophie. Look at the line-up of motors. Yes, I'm of the opinion that you should forgive him something.

SOPHIE. I might, if I were a theatre director.

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FALK. You should, as a wife. It's almost a sacred office for you.

SOPHIE. Oho!

FALK. Forgive and — take your revenge. The latter in particular has a rumored sweetness about it. Well *auf wiedersehen*, Sophie; *auf wiedersehen* soon. [*Answering her look.*] Perhaps in the Styrian woods. You know I'm invited to go hunting too. Or at least to play chess. A telegram is sufficient and I come, were it only to call for you and to escort you back to one who must be, do what you may, your inevitable choice. There are less noble men, Sophie — [*The door in the rear opens and Herbot strides into the room, clad in his Hamlet costume with a half-buttoned overcoat thrown over it.*]

FALK. What — ? Are you mad?

HERBOT. What's the matter? Why are you taking so long, Sophie? I peeped through the slit in the curtain and didn't see you in your box — [*Sophie replies with a frozen stare.*]

FALK [*goes up and takes him by the shoulders*]. Now really, do you wish to — It's five minutes after seven.

HERBOT. Let them wait! I won't go on a fraction of a minute before Sophie is seated in her box.

SOPHIE. But — but — I haven't dressed yet.

HERBOT. I don't care! Come with me as you are.

FALK [*to Herbot*]. See that you get a move on quickly, do you hear?

HERBOT. Sorry. But without her I don't move an inch. I know. I know. She made

## THE BIG SCENE

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up her mind not to come at all. She's probably told you everything. Memories were raked up. But look at her, Falk. As she stands there she is like a ghost carved in marble. But come to me — come. The past is dead — stone dead. Don't you understand that yet, dear? Try not to think of my former waywardness. What, after all, do my escapades with other women matter? Why trouble about other people? I've never loved anybody but you. If you refuse to come, I won't act. For all I care, our friend here may close down his theatre.

FALK. Six thousand four hundred Marks. Of course you can make that up, can't you?

HERBOT. The nerve! If Hamlet were played by some one else, you wouldn't have half the house you've got tonight. And if you, Sophie, are not in your box, I won't act today, nor tomorrow — never again and farewell to the stage. [He flings the sword he's been clutching from him.]

FALK [at the window]. There goes Her Highness.

HERBOT. A fig for Her Highness! Let her turn around and go back home, *your* Highness. There is but one High — [He is suddenly on his knee before Sophie. A Theatre Employee enters.]

T. E. I beg your pardon, *Herr Direktor*. It is seven-ten. His Royal Highness — the audience —

FALK [to Employee]. Ring up the curtain.

HERBOT [to Theatre Employee]. He says so, not I.

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FALK. Ring up the curtain! [*The Theatre Employee goes.*]

SOPHIE. Get up.

HERBOT. Are you coming? [*Sophie does not reply audibly but the expression on her face answers in the affirmative.*]

HERBOT [*rising to his feet and putting his arm about her waist, he takes the sword which Falk has picked up.*] "Was ever woman in this humor wooed?"

FALK. That isn't Hamlet. That's Richard the Third.

HERBOT. Well then, arm in arm with you—

FALK. That's from something else. You will make a holy mess of the performance tonight.

HERBOT. Why must it be just from "Hamlet"? [*Pressing Sophie close to his side.*] Isn't it a lofty line?

FALK. Are you ready? [*He thrusts them both through the door. The door for a moment affords a view in which the hotel guests, passing down the corridor, gaze astonished at the pair. Falk then turns the lights out, goes out and locks the door.*]

[CURTAIN.]

# THE FESTIVAL OF BACCHUS

## A COMEDY OF WORDS

### PERSONS

FELIX STAUFFNER, *writer.*

AGNES, *his wife.*

DR. GUIDO WERNIG.

RAILWAY GUARD.

WAITER.

BUFFET-DISPENSER (*a woman*).

*Passengers and Station employes.*

*The action takes place in the railroad waiting room of a large Austrian city in the mountains.*

[SCENE: Station and restaurant. In the rear glass doors giving onto the platform. Right a stairway conducting downstairs. On the left is the buffet, with a clock above it. A number of tables, covered and uncovered, with chairs. A blackboard near the middle platform door, right. On the wall are time-tables, maps, posters. The buffet dispenser is busy behind the buffet. Several people are seated at the tables. The guard stands by the middle platform door, which is open. As the curtain rises the train has just come in. Passengers enter from the platform and pass through the

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dining room on the right, using the steps. On the left Agnes and Guido are standing, almost motionless, with their eyes fixed intently on the door as if expecting someone. When the last of the passengers has passed through the waiting room, Guido steps up to the door and peers out on the platform. He makes a step as if to go out but is intercepted by the guard. Agnes in the meantime has also loitered up to the door.]

GUIDO. There's no one else.

AGNES. Strange!

GUIDO. Was that the Innsbruck train?  
[*The Guard locks the door.*]

GUARD. No, sir.

GUIDO. No?

GUIDO. That was the Bavarian express.  
The Innsbruck train is scheduled to arrive at  
5.20.

GUIDO. Why do you say "is scheduled to arrive"?

GUARD. Because it's almost always late.  
However, there has been no report yet.

GUIDO. You mean that it will arrive on time?

GUARD. No, that it will be late. [*Goes off left by the steps.*]

GUIDO [*glancing at the clock*]. We have fully  
eight minutes before us. [*Lights a cigarette.*]

AGNES. Eight minutes. [*Comes down and seats herself at one of the tables.*]

[*The Waiter approaches and hovers about.*]

## THE FESTIVAL OF BACCHUS

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GUIDO [*after a brief pause to Agnes, standing behind her chair*]. Agnes —

AGNES. Guido —?

GUIDO [*seating himself beside her*]. Wouldn't it be a better idea to —

WAITER. Your order, sir?

GUIDO. Thank you. We have just had something here.

[*Waiter, slightly piqued, shrugs his shoulders and goes off left.*]

GUIDO. Wouldn't it be better, I mean, if I waited for him alone?

AGNES. Why this sudden change of mind? Have you completely lost faith in my determination? Do you think that I shrink from meeting him face to face —

GUIDO. No, no. I have the greatest confidence in you. But I repeat: it's quite impossible to foretell how he'll take the news. And that's why —

AGNES [*rising fervently*]. No. We've made up our minds. We'll wait for him together. In this way the situation will at once be made clear to him. And that in itself is a big advantage. No superfluous words will be necessary. It's only fair to us — and to him. We owe him that much. Or, if you like, I at least owe it to him. [The whistle of a locomotive is heard. Agnes starts but does not turn. Guido rises. A railway employee comes from the platform, meticulously locks the door after him, and writes on the blackboard: "Express No. 57 from Innsbruck — 44 minutes late." He intercepts a woman

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*with two children at the door and closes it again behind him. Guido and Agnes have not turned around. The whistle of the locomotive dies away.]*

GUIDO [*close to her*]. Agnes, do you love me?

AGNES. I adore you. And you?

GUIDO. You know. [*Hastily.*] And in one hour all will be over. Bear that in mind. Tomorrow we will be far away. Think of that when you face him. Together — forever!

AGNES [*somewhat mechanically*]. Forever — [*without looking round*]. Hasn't it come in yet?

GUIDO [*turning round*]. The eight minutes are up. [*The Guard re-enters.*]

GUIDO [*noticing the writing on the board*]. Oh!

AGNES [*following his glance*]. What is it?

GUIDO. Delay; forty-four minutes' delay.

GUARD. More likely an hour.

GUIDO. Here it is very plain, forty-four minutes. Forty-four! I dare say that's calculated to the dot.

GUARD [*coldly*]. Oh, she may make it in less.

[*He goes over to the buffet, exchanges a few words with the coffee-dispenser, and then goes off. Guido and Agnes stare at one another.*]

GUIDO. That's so.

AGNES. One hour —

GUIDO. Let's go outside a bit.

AGNES. But it hasn't stopped raining. But if you want to take a walk — I'll wait for you here.

## THE FESTIVAL OF BACCHUS

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I prefer to look at the illustrated papers. [Sits, taking up a newspaper.]

[*Guido approaches the buffet and sets his watch by the clock.*]

AGNES [*gazing at him with a smile*]. He must be pretty impatient, too, in his compartment.

GUIDO [*returning to her*]. How — do you mean, Agnes?

AGNES. As you know, he telegraphed that he was coming from Stubai on the five-twenty train. I fancy he's under the impression that I'm waiting for him after these six weeks of separation, and that together we'll take the train back to Seewalchen, to our villa. Well, I am waiting for him — only it isn't quite as he imagined it.

GUIDO. It would be more agreeable to me if you'd refrain from going off on a sentimental jag this way.

AGNES. Sentimental — ? I? Would I be here, if I were sentimental? [*Brief pause.*]

GUIDO [*making conversation*]. You've missed the six o'clock train anyway.

AGNES. There's another at seven.

GUIDO. Do you think he'll take it?

AGNES. Why not? I'll beg him to — And if you know him at all, he's the sort of man — [*Breaking off.*] He'll find everything at home as he left it. I've ordered Therese to prepare everything as if —

GUIDO. That wasn't quite necessary. If he ever loved you he will never put foot into a house in which he lived with you for five summers — [*bitterly*] and happily at that.

AGNES. Yes, he will. He's awfully fond of

## COMEDIES OF WORDS

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the little cottage and the landscape. At any rate, they haven't changed.

GUIDO. I'm sure he won't go back to it this year any more.

AGNES. If he's wise, he'll go right home and sleep there tonight.

GUIDO. In a house — alive with such memories?

AGNES [*staring straight ahead of her*]. Let's hope that he's already started to forget me on the return trip.

GUIDO. Do you imagine that he will?

AGNES. Well, isn't it the best thing we can wish him? [*She takes a newspaper again and pretends to be absorbed in it.*]

GUIDO [*eyeing Agnes, paces up and down, adjusts his watch again, then stepping up to her*]. We might take something. [*Taps on the table, then takes a newspaper and flutters the leaves nervously, glancing all the while at Agnes, who seems quite absorbed in reading, calling petulantly:*] Waiter.

WAITER [*appearing, still slightly piqued*]. Yes, sir.

GUIDO. Bring me — [*To Agnes.*] What'll you have?

AGNES. It's immaterial to me.

GUIDO. Well, bring two lemon sodas.

AGNES. I prefer raspberry. [*Waiter moves away. Pause. Guido fixes his eyes on Agnes.*]

AGNES [*continuing to read; smiling*]. Here's something about you.

GUIDO. About me?

AGNES. Yes. "Regatta at Attersee. First

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prize, Baron Ramming, yacht *Storm*; second prize, Dr. Guido Wernig, yacht *Watersprite*."

GUIDO. Quite right. You see, such insignificant nobodies like myself do get into the papers sometimes. Of course, only on corresponding insignificant occasions — and then they capture only second prize.

AGNES. Next time it will be the first — on another See.

GUIDO. You're very optimistic. But — isn't it the hand of destiny?

AGNES [*with an inquiring glance*]. The second prize?

GUIDO. The delay, I mean. Once again you have enough time to think it over. [*She beckons him to draw nearer.*] Perhaps it isn't so simple a thing as you imagine. When you've once been the helpmate of a great man, to become the wife of a quite ordinary doctor of chemistry —

AGNES [*interrupting him quickly*]. In the first place, Guido, your factory in your particular line is quite as well known as the collected works of my husband.

GUIDO. What have I to do with the factory? My father founded it — managed it — I am only his son.

AGNES. Besides, I didn't fall in love with Felix because he was a great man, as you put it. Whoever heard of him when we were married?

GUIDO. But you foresaw it —

AGNES. Foresaw it — yes.

[*Waiter comes with sodas. He places the glasses on the table. Agnes and Guido are silent. The Waiter moves away. Pause.*]

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GUIDO. Why are you silent, Agnes?

AGNES [*staring straight ahead*]. How mysterious life is! Six weeks ago, no more than six weeks ago, I crossed the lake with him in the small steamboat — six weeks. I said good bye to him almost on this very spot. And how the world has changed in this short time! If he — if we had guessed that bright summer day —

GUIDO. Do you regret it, Agnes? If so, there is still time.

AGNES [*as if waking from a trance*]. I regret nothing — nothing. All that has happened was destined to happen. Don't you know I realize that, Guido? And all that has happened points to our happiness together — and also to his.

GUIDO. His?

AGNES. I have no doubt he'll thank me right off seeing I've given him back his freedom. People of his sort —

GUIDO. "People of his sort —"

AGNES. Everything in life has its deeper meaning. It is well, it is perhaps profoundly necessary that he should from now on dwell in solitude.

GUIDO. In solitude —? What do you call solitude?

AGNES [*looking up*]. What do you mean by that?

GUIDO. Nothing, but what you imagine yourself.

AGNES. Don't try to evade my question. You did the same once before in a similar circumstance.

## THE FESTIVAL OF BACCHUS

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GUIDO. How so? When?

AGNES. On the train.

GUIDO. I'm sure my allusion is not beyond your surmise. The suspicion that not his play alone kept him in Stubaital six weeks, instead of the projected three, surely is not new to you today. You smile?

AGNES. It's a bit amusing to me the way you're trying, very obviously, to make me jealous.

GUIDO. Far from it. But, if you'll pardon my saying it, I don't see any sense in your seeking to surround your — your former husband with a kind of halo. He is every bit of a human being. In certain respects he's not a whit better than I and —

AGNES [*laughing*]. And you — you wished to say. Very kind of you, I'm sure.

GUIDO. Don't misunderstand me.

AGNES. Oh, I understand you perfectly. You want me to believe that Mademoiselle X —

GUIDO. Bianca Walter —

AGNES. Whose postscript is on the picture post card, has contrived somehow to detain my husband —

GUIDO. Your husband that was — Herr Felix Stauffner.

AGNES. Felix —

GUIDO. I'm not trying to convince you, I merely make the statement.

AGNES. Without evidence you can prove nothing. Besides the truth will soon out.

GUIDO. How do you make that out?

AGNES. He will tell the truth.

GUIDO. In all probability you won't have to

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hear it. Aside from the fact that it is immaterial to you and that the moment my conjectures are confirmed you will be pleased.

AGNES. I shall be quite happy over it. Need I tell you that? Nothing more desirable could happen to me than if he stepped off the train with Fräulein Bianca or somebody else.

GUIDO. I'm afraid, Agnes, that you conceive life as too simple a thing. Mademoiselle X —

AGNES. Bianca.

GUIDO. Will not accompany him. She will remain in Stubai for the present.

AGNES. With her mother?

GUIDO. Why with her mother? Why bother about her mother?

AGNES. Because her name, too, is on the picture post card. However, I think we are doing the young lady an injustice and celebrating a little prematurely. Doubtless she is a respectable girl of good family. An admirer of my — my Felix Staufner, just like her mother. [She takes a card out of her purse and reads:] "Isabella Walter and her daughter cannot omit the opportunity of gratefully sending their heartfelt greetings to the wife of the master —"

GUIDO. A bit wordy.

AGNES. But very unsuspicious.

GUIDO. You carry the card about with you?

AGNES. I had no time to put it away.

GUIDO. You have answered it, then?

AGNES. Why not? It's the last. It arrived four days ago. And it's positively the last he's written as my husband.

## THE FESTIVAL OF BACCHUS

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[*Guido makes as if to take the card; she makes a gesture of refusal and he seems hurt.*]

AGNES. Just one word.

GUIDO. What sort of word, if I may ask?

AGNES. *Auf wiedersehen.*

[*Guido bites his lip.*]

AGNES. Well, doesn't it seem proper? I didn't write "*Auf gutes wiedersehen,*" or "*Auf glückliches wiedersehen,*" simply "*Auf wiedersehen.*"

GUIDO. And did you write him letters, too, during this time?

AGNES. Only one.

GUIDO. Well — well!

AGNES. That was before there was anything between you and me; before that evening — when you suddenly appeared in my garden under my window — and called my name in the dark. Yes, in this way one sometimes writes a farewell letter without suspecting it! How mysterious life — [*Guido has taken the card in his hand and seems bent on crumpling it.*]

AGNES. What are you doing, Guido?

GUIDO. You love him still.

AGNES [earnestly]. No, Guido, I love no one but you. I have never loved anybody — not even Felix — as much as I love you. [*Grasping his hand.*] But I shall never cease [*letting his hand go*] to admire and to respect Felix Staufner; to be spiritually akin to Felix Staufner, the writer. In a certain sense relations such as existed between Felix and myself can never alter — never. The fact that we were married is of least importance. Even if I should never see him

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again, if we should remain miles and miles apart —

GUIDO [*interrupting*]. Yes, if you would only remain miles and miles apart! Well and good. Then everything would be all right; then I'd have nothing to oppose to your spiritual relations. But, unfortunately, I can't spend my life taking endless trips. I must be back in harness in the damned —

AGNES. Certainly; I'd never permit you to give up your profession. You must work, even if it isn't absolutely necessary. I don't propose to take up with an idler.

GUIDO. I don't intend to give up my profession. But what's to prevent my practicing it elsewhere? I'll speak to the governor. As it is, he's been planning for sometime to establish a branch office in Germany or America.

AGNES. Or Australia.

GUIDO. The farther the better.

AGNES. Guido!

GUIDO. I simply can't bear to have you meet your former husband again.

AGNES [*determined*]. I shan't permit you at the eleventh hour to violate all our stipulations. You know that Felix is not like other men —

GUIDO. Do you really believe that he won't find another — friend very soon?

AGNES. A friend? No. Never. A mistress — certainly. And whether her name be Bianca or something else — I only hope that I'll be able to approve of his choice.

GUIDO. Why do you hope so? Do you in-

## THE FESTIVAL OF BACCHUS

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tend to be friendly with the future mistress of your husband?

AGNES. If things should fall out so —

GUIDO. They will not fall out so. I wish to make clear to you that I desire to keep our home — as soon as our affairs are in order, and that will be soon, I trust — respectable. And I warn you that this — mind you, I don't say uninteresting — partly dubious crowd of artists and actor-folk of both sexes who used to frequent your house, will not be welcome under my roof.

AGNES. As regards dubious affairs, you ought to —

GUIDO. That's another matter entirely. A real passion explains, condones everything. And besides, your husband deserves his fate.

AGNES. Oh!

GUIDO. A woman, I hold, must be guarded jealously like a priceless gem. One should never leave a young woman alone, wholly alone among a crowd of young people in summer — near a lake —

AGNES. In spite of his doubts he trusted me. It's all part and parcel of the paradox in his make-up.

GUIDO. A man doesn't trust a woman whom he loves. He trembles for her. He fights for her. I shall never trust you. Even after we've lived together for years. Even if we should have children — and we will have children. I will always be concerned about you. To make sure of a woman one must keep on insulting her.

AGNES. But he never resorted to that. He

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was jealous oftener than you think. He was jealous even of you.

GUIDO. Of me — ! Well, I thought —

AGNES. That was before he had the slightest grounds. Even then — How mysterious —

GUIDO. Life is.

AGNES. We had scarcely spoken three times together. Naturally he said nothing, but I noticed that it was so. For the life of me, I couldn't make it out. You were out sailing on the lake all day long — at the outset. Only in the evening did you venture to sit beside us on the hotel terrace and chatter all manner of nonsense which, to tell the truth, didn't interest me the least bit.

GUIDO. Nonsense — why —

AGNES. I only mean to say that everything was quite harmless in those early days. Admit that you didn't trouble at all about me. The little Baroness Fellah meant more to you — and the Lord knows who else? But he saw it coming. I observed it in his glances. He suspected immediately that you — that you only —

GUIDO. And still he left you to your own devices. Saw it coming and went away on a trip.

AGNES. It's a way with him when he's greatly absorbed in a piece of work. Everything else is put aside.

GUIDO. And he fled [*pointedly*] to solitude.

AGNES [*ignoring his innuendo*]. At all events he stopped caring about people — that is, about people whom he loved.

GUIDO. Did he leave you alone often?

AGNES. Sometimes. But that was not the

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worst. It was much more uncomfortable when he stayed at home and left me alone. When my voice had lost its caress, when I became, in a measure, paler, more shadowy than any being he ever created; when I felt myself snuffed out — for him —

GUIDO. For me — you will never be snuffed out — never, Agnes.

AGNES [*as if waking from a trance*]. Never, Guido! You will never leave me alone. You will never repair to solitude and forget me for days, weeks, at a stretch, as he's done. It isn't good to leave us women alone. You are right, Guido. It's quite perilous — it's — [*For several minutes past there has been a commotion in the waiting room. Passengers come up the steps. The Guard enters from the right and goes to the platform door.*]

GUIDO. What's the matter? [*Glancing at the clock above the buffet.*] There's still twelve minutes. [*Guard opens the door.*]

AGNE. It seems as if —

GUIDO [*quickly to the Guard*]. The Innsbruck train?

GUARD. Yes, sir.

GUIDO. I thought you said it wouldn't arrive before ten minutes yet — ?

GUARD. She's made up a bit for lost time.

GUIDO [*to Agnes*]. You are pale. Don't you care to — [*Passengers go through the waiting room to the platform outside.*]

AGNES [*passionately shaking her head*]. Let us go out, don't you think?

GUIDO. On the platform?

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AGNES. Yes. It's better than waiting out here. I wish him to see us directly from the car window.

GUIDO. I don't know.

AGNES. Come. [They start to go out on the platform.]

GUARD. Platform tickets, please.

GUIDO. Good Lord! [Searching in his purse.] Here. [Offers the Guard money.]

GUARD. Over there, at the ticket machine.

GUIDO. But the train will be in by that time.

GUARD. There's lots of time yet.

GUIDO [goes to the ticket machine, deposits a few coins and yanks the lever in vain]. It doesn't work.

GUARD [going over to the machine, tries to manipulate the lever, fails, then shakes his head]. Don't work sometimes.

GUIDO. But we'll —

GUARD. Ah, there you are. It's all right now. [Hands two tickets to Guido. Back to the door which he has previously closed and now reopens.] Here she comes now. [Noise of an incoming train.]

AGNES. Your hand, Guido. [Hand in hand they go through the door — way onto the platform. As they pass out Felix appears on the right, mounting the steps. He spies Agnes, makes as if to follow, observes almost simultaneously that she is not alone and is just in time to see her disappear hand in hand with Guido on the platform. He remains standing a moment. Then makes a step towards them. At the platform door he pauses again. Then he strides to

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the other platform door and seems to be following with his eyes the pair of them as they go to meet the incoming train. He steps back, passes his hand over his forehead and peers through the glass door. The pair vanish out of sight. The train has already stopped and the passengers pour in from the platform. Most of them pass through the waiting room to the steps on the right. Several take seats at the tables; several step up to the buffet and order refreshments. Felix advances to the center of the stage. The stream of passengers rushes by him. He feels he must get out of their path, so he steps back again to the open platform door. He looks for Agnes and Guido. Gazing intently out, he watches them. Then, as if fearing to be observed, he drops back. On his face there is depicted complete understanding of the situation. Answering a sudden impulse to escape, he hurries to the steps on the right. He remains standing there a moment, shakes his head and hastens again to the closed platform door, peering out. The last of the passengers are leaving the platform. Moving away from the door Felix comes to the front in an attitude of suspense, with his face contorted into a smile. Then, growing serious again, he seats himself at a table on the right, the same, in fact, at which Agnes and Guido had sat before. Mechanically he picks up a newspaper and glances above it in the direction of the platform door. The Guard has already shut the door. He opens it again. First there enters a belated woman with a multiplicity of hand bags, then a station official, and lastly Guido and Agnes. They do not at first

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*discover Felix, who is intrenched behind his newspaper.]*

GUIDO. Amazing —

AGNES. Is there another train today?

GUIDO. Let's have a look at the time-table.

[*They go to the time-table on the wall next to the steps. Guido studies it carefully.*] Nine — twelve — no, that's not from Innsbruck. If we could only find out somehow. Just wait —

FELIX [*putting the newspaper aside, rises and strides quickly toward Agnes and Guido, who are studying the time-table. For a space he stands motionless behind her. He speaks suddenly in an unsuspecting, joyous tone.*] Well, here you are, Agnes. [Agnes turns around, likewise Guido, but they utter no word.]

FELIX [*overlooking the awkwardness of the situation very quickly*]. You see, I came up on the earlier train, at noon. Unfortunately I couldn't telegraph you in time. It was a sudden whim of mine. I awoke somewhat earlier this morning. My things were all packed. So I said to myself: "Suppose you take the first train and loaf about Salzburg for several hours." I'm glad to see you, Agnes — glad to see you. [Wrings her hand.] How d'ye do, doctor? What are you doing here? En route for Vienna? [Extends his hand.] Your vacation's over, I suppose.

GUIDO [*hesitatingly taking the proffered hand*]. No, I'm not going to Vienna. I was glad to escort your — your wife permitted me to — and, really — [Agnes casts an anxious glance at him, which is not lost on Felix.]

FELIX [*quickly interrupting*]. Very good of

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you, doctor. My wife loves to chat. Very kind of you, doctor, to keep her company. When one has taken the trip thirty or forty times the beauties of nature grow banal. [Suddenly.] But Agnes, let me look at you. We haven't seen each other for such an age. Six weeks! I don't recollect our ever having been parted so long during the five years we've been married. Isn't that so?

AGNES. You're looking very well, Felix.

FELIX. Am I? Well, I hope so. And you, too. Why, you seem to have grown a little stouter. And you're sunburnt, quite sunburnt. You were out in the open a good deal, weren't you? And then the weather was simply glorious. But today — of course. It was very nice of you to come to meet me.

AGNES. But you asked me to.

FELIX. I simply wanted to let you know. I didn't reckon on it for a moment. Besides, it's two and a half hours from Seewalchen to here. And you had to change, too. Take it any way you like, it's a trip — even with the doctor's pleasant company.

GUIDO. As regards my accompanying your wife, allow me —

AGNES [*interrupting, suddenly to Felix*]. You were here, then, at twelve? What have you done until now?

FELIX. I'll tell you presently. [*Indicating the table.*] Won't you join me — I've a tremendous hankering for a cup of coffee. And you? Or have you already had some? Waiter! Waiter! What was that you asked a moment

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ago? How I passed the time? Well, as it was dinner time, I dined in town, of course — very well, too — at the Nurnberg. [Sits.] Well, doctor, won't you join us? [Agnes sits.]

GUIDO [*with a meaningful glance at Agnes*]. I don't really know whether — You see, I have —

FELIX [*quickly*]. No ceremony, doctor. Please. [*To waiter who approaches*.] Let us have some — [to Agnes] — coffee, eh? And what'll you have, doctor?

GUIDO [*who has taken a seat in response to a wink of Agnes*]. I have just —

AGNES [*quickly to waiter*]. Three mélanges, please. [*Waiter is about to go*.]

FELIX. I'll have mine a bit strong. And, by the way, have you still got that coffee cake you had six weeks ago? It was delicious.

AGNES. You remember it still?

FELIX. You liked it, too. [*To the waiter*.] Well, bring us some coffee cake with the coffee. [*Waiter goes*.]

FELIX. Now — what were we talking about? Oh, yes. I dined at the Nurnberg and then I loafed about town —

AGNES. In the rain?

FELIX. Ah, I didn't mind it the least bit. Coming upon the sultriness of the morning it was a veritable godsend. Then, you see, I called on Sebastian Schwartz for half an hour.

AGNES [*by way of explanation to Guido*]. That's the antique dealer, you know.

FELIX. You aren't interested in antiques, I presume, doctor?

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GUIDO. I don't understand enough about them. But —

FELIX [*quickly to Agnes*]. He has lots of beautiful things. Some of them quite expensive.

AGNES. And I suppose you untied your purse-strings liberally again.

FELIX. Not much. I've already had several things sent on to Seewalchen to the villa. A nampulla such as we've wanted for a long time.

AGNES. For the dining room?

FELIX. Yes, of course. Certainly you can hang it in the dining room if you wish. And then I bought a lovely amulet. Baroque. Genuine. Aqua marine with a little silver chain — wait until you see it. I have it here in my purse. But, tell me, when did you arrive? At four, I take it?

AGNES. No, I dined in town, too.

GUIDO. We had dinner here, too.

AGNES [*resuming*]. We ate at the station and —

FELIX [*quickly*]. And loafed about town until now. Curious, isn't it, that we didn't meet?

GUIDO. We took a drive.

AGNES. Considering the bad weather — the doctor was very kind — [*Waiter brings coffee, etc. Felix, moving back his chair, causes the table and glasses to tremble. Waiter is somewhat taken aback. Guido seems to hesitate a moment, then, with nervous haste, he does likewise. Felix stirs his coffee. The waiter goes off with the newspapers.*]

GUIDO [*with sudden determination*]. Mr. Staufner, I must ask —

FELIX [*quickly*]. But drink your coffee, old

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man. And let me enjoy mine while I may. Then, if it suits you, you may ask my indulgence to whatever you please. I find tiffin the nicest refreshment of the day. I can do without my dinner, but never without my afternoon coffee.

GUIDO. Mr. Staufner, you asked me a moment ago whether I was going to Vienna. Well —

FELIX [quickly]. Excuse my having asked. I noticed the effect on you was painful. I don't want to have appeared indiscreet. What you have decided to do with the rest of your vacation is clearly a personal matter. Enjoy life as long — and so on. Aren't you going to take over the management of the Hollenstein factory when your father is ready to retire —

GUIDO. My father is quite robust. He has no intention of retiring from business. [*He endeavors to exchange glances with Agnes who, however, avoids his look.*]

FELIX. How old is he, if I may ask?

GUIDO. Sixty-two. But as I said —

FELIX. In any case, the main burden will soon fall to your shoulders. So enjoy life as long as you may. And above all things else, travel.

AGNES. The doctor has traveled considerable. He's already been to America.

GUIDO. Yes, I've been to South America.

FELIX. Indeed. To South America. And do you know Japan at all?

GUIDO. No, I don't know Japan.

FELIX. Japan has lured me for ever so long. Don't you feel like going there too, Agnes?

AGNES. There are many places not so far.

FELIX. What of that? Do you expect to

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travel round the world inch by inch? It can't be done. What kind of hat are you wearing, Agnes?

AGNES. You know it.

FELIX. The red band is kind of new to me.

AGNES. Yes, it is new.

FELIX. Quite a summer hue. It glows and sparkles. [He repeats the phrase, but almost in an uncontrollable threatening tone of voice.] It glows and sparkles.

[Agnes gazes at him in terror and shoots a sudden glance at Guido. Guido involuntarily assumes a dignified posture.]

FELIX [glancing up, in a gentler tone]. You are not interested in women's hats, I presume, doctor?

GUIDO [as if perceiving an opportunity to fasten his fangs]. Not generally. But I am interested in this one, Mr. Staufner. And not only —

[Agnes looks at him frightened.]

FELIX. Not only in the hat, but also, the wearer. That goes without saying. I am too, doctor. Naturally the hat would be a matter of indifference to both of us if, say, it hung over there on that hook.

GUARD [entering and calling out]. Passenger train to Schwannemarkt, Bocklabruck, Atnang, Linz, Vienna.

GUIDO [pushing back his chair as if to rise]. Mr. Staufner —

FELIX. Oh, yes. That's your train. If you intend going back to Seewalchen you'll have to make a connection. [To Agnes, who looks at him quite confused.] You thought it was ours, too?

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No, it is not ours, Agnes. I understand fully, doctor — this attraction to the field of your triumph. Yes, your triumph — [*laughing loudly*]. My cordial wishes are perhaps a little tardy at this moment.

GUIDO [*taken aback*]. How —? [Agnes gazes at Felix, not understanding.]

FELIX. You — [*pause*] — won — at the Regatta, didn't you?

GUIDO [*involuntarily heaving a sigh of relief*]. Oh, thank you. It was only the second prize.

AGNES [*likewise relieved*]. How do you come to know about it?

FELIX. Why, it's in the newspaper.

AGNES. You read the sporting page nowadays? Since when?

FELIX. Not all of it. But news about See-walchen, for obvious reasons, interested me. Moreover, it was on the train, where one reads everything, even one's railway ticket. [To Guido.] Have you been interested in yachting very long?

GUIDO. Quite a number of years. On Ostersee mostly in the past.

FELIX. On Binnensee, I imagine, it's more difficult.

GUIDO. Not necessarily.

FELIX. Unfortunately, I know nothing about it.

GUIDO. I suppose you haven't taken up sport, Mr. Staufner?

FELIX. Oh, yes — yes. Mostly of a tourist character. I climb a good deal. In Stubai I negotiated several trails.

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AGNES. Alone?

FELIX. The big ones, yes. On the little ones I had a party along. Two ladies — mother and daughter. The young lady kept up very nicely on foot.

AGNES. Miss Bianca Walter —?

FELIX. How do you —? Why, yes.

AGNES. I hazard the guess she's blond. That's your favorite color.

FELIX. Of course, she's blond. Would you care to know more about her? She's a young actress just beginning her career. She played something for me once — *The Jungfrau von Orleans*.

AGNES. Very nice.

FELIX. It was, indeed. By the bye, I should have her picture somewhere about me.

AGNES. Her picture? You have her picture about you —?

FELIX. Yes. [*He takes it out of his breast pocket.*] She gave it to me before I left. The first chance I get I'd like to show it to a manager. She wants ever so much to get a position in Vienna. She imagines it only needs a word from me. These women certainly are naïve! The mother wasn't bad-looking, either.

AGNES. Isabella.

FELIX. Isabella? Why, yes, of course. Isabella was the mother's name.

AGNES. And the daughter's Bianca.

FELIX. Isabella was the mother's name and the daughter's Bianca. Sounds like a ballad almost. [*To Guido.*] Don't you think so?

GUIDO [icily]. I'm no judge.

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AGNES. But I thought you had no intention of making any acquaintances there, and that you were going to devote yourself exclusively to your work?

FELIX. Oh, appearances to the contrary, I was quite assiduous. You will be quite satisfied with me, I think.

AGNES [*with an effort*]. Have you finished?

FELIX. Finished? Not quite.

AGNES. Under the circumstances little else was to be expected.

FELIX. How malevolent you can be, Agnes! No reason for it — at all. When luck's on my side, as you know, I can get through in three or four days. Only I need your advice.

AGNES [*joyful in spite of herself*]. My — advice?

FELIX. Yes, without equivocation. First, I'd like to talk it over with you. I'll also read you as much as I have. So let's not take the train back to Seewalchen for the present. Until I have cleared up everything I don't care to go back. And here in Salzburg, I know from previous experience I can work extraordinarily well. That's why we'll stay here for a few days.

AGNES. We're going to stay here? That's rather new to me.

FELIX. To me, also. I simply mean that the idea struck me on the train. You're with me in this, aren't you? We've only got to telegraph to good old Therese, asking her to send you whatever you need — absolute necessities. Of course, some superfluous things, too. And whatever for the present you're urgently in want of we can purchase today. Or have you, by chance, in response

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to some secret presentiment, brought your little crocodile purse with you?

GUIDO [*as if sensing the underlying meaning. Externally unruffled, but without malice.*]. I put the crocodile purse in my suitcase, thinking it safer there.

FELIX. Indeed? Capital! Then everything is in ship-shape. And you're glad to stay on, aren't you, Agnes? The three days, I promise you, will pass quickly. All difficulties will be surmounted — and before we return to our little country house I shall put the finishing touch to — [*he hesitates*] — “The Festival of Bacchus.”

AGNES [*taken by surprise*]. “The Festival of Bacchus”?

FELIX. Yes; why these wide eyes of wonderment?

AGNES. You're writing “The Festival of Bacchus”?

FELIX. Yes.

AGNES. But you started out with quite a different purpose.

FELIX. Quite right. But, soon after, on the way to Stubaital, it flashed upon me, before anything else, I must do “The Festival of Bacchus.” There are good and sufficient reasons for this change. It was conditioned by mysterious laws.

GUIDO. Yes, life is very mysterious.

FELIX. Life — no. Not more than ordinarily so. But art is. Yes, art is most — A thing of this sort is leavened within. It matures deep in the recesses of self. [*Indicating his forehead.*] Here one knows nothing about it. So

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it is. [*Breaking off in another tone.*] Two acts, as I said, are finished. Only in the third act I find I'm up against it, and no thoroughfare. Well, you'll hear it and, I have no doubt, something suggestive will occur to you.

AGNES. If you think so — [*The waiter has appeared.*]

FELIX [*noticing him*]. Oh, yes. Well — ?

GUIDO. Mine was a mélange —

FELIX. What a notion, doctor? [*The waiter.*] Three mélanges and three portions of coffee cake.

GUIDO. Four — I had two.

FELIX [*laughing*]. Ah, yes; four then.

WAITER. Five.

FELIX. Five?

AGNES. You crumbled one.

FELIX. Oh, did I? Really? Well, then, five.

WAITER. Two crowns, 40 pfennig.

FELIX [*counting*]. Very well.

WAITER [*discreetly to Guido*]. And then there were two lemon sodas.

GUIDO. Ah, yes. [*Is about to pay.*]

FELIX [*noticing Guido's attempt*]. What is that? Ah, yes? [*Gaily.*] Please, please. [*Is about to pay.*]

GULDO. I insist —

FELIX. Please let me. Two sodas. Here you are. [*Pays. Waiter goes. Felix extracts a cigarette case from his pocket and offers Guido a cigarette.*]

GUIDO [*falteringly helping himself to a cigarette*]. Thanks.

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[*Felix offers him a light and then proceeds to light his own.*]

GUIDO. And now, if you'll excuse me, I must be going.

FELIX. Good day, doctor, and a pleasant journey to you — whatever route you decide to take.

GUIDO. Thanks. Good bye, my dear Mrs. Stauffner. [*Not yet does he dare to extend his hand.*] I trust soon — [*overjoyed at the sudden idea*] — perhaps I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again at the première of your husband's new play —

AGNES. I shall be pleased —

FELIX. You're in no way bound to attend, doctor.

GUIDO. No trouble at all. You see, I've never missed one of your first nights yet. So, naturally, I shall not fail to be present at the opening of "The Festival of Bax —"

FELIX. Bacchus, doctor.

GUIDO. I beg your pardon.

FELIX. It's not a mythological play, as appears from the title, neither is it in verse, if such things scare you away.

GUIDO. Not at all.

FELIX. The title is only used metaphorically, of course. If I attempted to put on a real Festival of Bacchus, I'd have no end of trouble with the censor, as you can imagine.

GUIDO. I'm ashamed to confess that I don't know what a Festival of Bacchus is.

FELIX. Really? The Festival of Bacchus was a quaint custom of the ancient Greeks — a religious custom, you might say.

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GUIDO. A — religious custom?

FELIX [*with marginal lilt and brevity*]. Yes. A night was set aside once a year at the season of the vintage, if I err not, when men and women were granted unlimited freedom after a fashion —

GUIDO. Unlimited freedom —

FELIX [*very cool, merely informative*]. After a fashion. On this night of nights all family ties, all prescriptive laws were dissolved. Men, women, and girls departed from their homes at sundown — homes whose peace they had surrounded and protected — and repaired to a sacred grove (there were many such groves in the land) to celebrate under the sheltering wing of night the divine festival —

GUIDO. The divine festival —

FELIX. The divine festival.

GUIDO. Under the wing of night.

FELIX. Yes.

GUIDO. And supposing the moon shone?

FELIX. That did not matter. At daybreak — the festival was over, and every participant was pledged to forget with whom he celebrated his share of the divine festival. Pledged in all honor. That was a part of the religious custom — just as the celebration itself. To recognize one another afterward would have been considered in bad taste, as being, indeed, frivolous. And, as the saying runs, the votaries of the gods, somewhat tired and yet refreshed, in a measure even purified, wended their way home.

GUIDO. And at home one had an exciting theme for discussion ready to hand — until the next festival.

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FELIX. At home nothing was allowed to be said about the festival. There'd be no sense in that. There was as little individual responsibility for the experiences of that night — as there is for dreams.

GUIDO. But didn't it sometimes happen that a couple who had found themselves together in a sacred grove, had no desire to escape from one another's sight so soon — and neither of them showed up at home?

FELIX. That was impossible. The penalty for that was death.

AGNES. Death — ?

FELIX. Yes, death. They had to part when the sun rose. The ritual in this respect was very strict.

GUIDO. You say the penalty was death — ?

FELIX. To be exact, there was an extenuating circumstance.

GUIDO. Ah!

FELIX [*with emphasis*]. When two people who had found themselves together under the wing of night yearned for one another still on the following night — this happened less frequently than one imagines — no one was allowed, neither husband nor wife nor father nor mother, to stand in their way. And these two met again on the same spot where they had parted in the morning. But from the second night — and here we must really marvel at the wisdom of the priests — from this second night, which was no longer a festival to the god, there was no asylum. Their former home was closed to them and they were for the remainder of their days dependent on one

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another. That is why so very few cared to leave their homes on the second night. [Pause.]

GUIDO. You've looked up the mythology of it pretty thoroughly for your comedy, Mr. Stauffer.

FELIX. It wasn't necessary. If you were to investigate you would discover that my version doesn't correspond exactly. For, as I said, the Festival of Bacchus is but a symbol suitable to my purpose. My play is set in the present, and the present lacks several things which makes the revival of such a beautiful, simple and pure celebration as the ancient Festival of Bacchus, impossible. People have grown too irreligious. Instead of experiencing the natural naturally, they befog things with their pedantic psychology. Nowadays Festivals of Bacchus are no longer possible because our love-life is murky, yes, poisoned by lies and self-deception, by jealousy and fear, by insolence and remorse. Only occasionally — and this but in pious souls — there is kindled a faint or still more brilliant reflection of the marvelous magic which once pervaded the Festival of Bacchus. And this magic is perhaps of a higher order than the other. But who of us can glory in his own piety? Who of us — ?

GUARD [*entering*]. Express to Freilassing, Rosenheim, Munich, Paris —

FELIX [*in an altered tone of voice*]. Isn't that your train, doctor?

GUIDO [*surprised*]. My train — ?

AGNES. For Paris. Of course it's your train, doctor.

GUIDO. Well let it be — And now I must

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see about my baggage. Dear Mrs. Stauffner — [Agnes gives him her hand. Guido hesitates a moment, then kisses it. He bows to Felix. Felix extends his hand. Guido takes it hurriedly, then goes down the steps. Pause. Commotion. Passengers pass out to the platform with porters, etc.]

AGNES [looking at him, after a long pause]. And what kind of a reflection is that?

[Felix looks at her as if he did not quite follow her meaning.]

AGNES. The reflection in pious souls which you just mentioned, which to you signifies a loftier magic than the marvelous festival itself — this festival which according to you is no longer celebrated nowadays?

FELIX [almost crudely]. This magic is called — forgetting. But we don't believe in that, you and I.

AGNES. You may be right. There may, however, be another which is easier to believe in. [Felix gives her a questioning look.]

AGNES. Understanding. [She has the picture in her hand and crushes it. Felix laughs curtly.]

GUIDO [entering from the right with two handbags. He steps up to the table]. Pardon me, since it was most convenient to check both bags on one ticket — I —

AGNES [anxiously]. Thank you, very much. Please put it here.

GUIDO. Don't mention it. [He places Agnes' handbag on the chair which he previously occupied.]

FELIX [rising suddenly]. Dr. Wernig —

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GUIDO [*comprehending, with great dignity*]. If it is your pleasure, Mr. Staufner, I can likewise put off my departure.

AGNES [*quickly, with determination*]. You will depart on this train, Guido.

[*Felix looks at her. Guido stands irresolute. Pause.*]

FELIX. You may go! [Guido bows and goes out on the platform.]

FELIX [*sits. His face is contorted. Then he rises again, as if to follow Guido. Agnes restrains him by grasping his arm. Felix reseats himself. Agnes tears Bianca's picture into small bits.*]

FELIX [*bitterly*]. If this were all!

AGNES [*with a ghost of a smile*]. We must be pious, both of us.

FELIX [*in a sudden hollow tone of voice*]. I hate you!

AGNES. And I hate you a thousand times more bitterly — [*with a new expression of tenderness*] — my lover!

[CURTAIN.]

## **OTHER PLAYS**



LITERATURE  
A PLAY IN ONE ACT  
PERSONS

MARGARET.

CLEMENT.

GILBERT.

[SCENE: *Moderately well, but quite inexpensively furnished apartments occupied by Margaret. A small fireplace, a table, a small escritoire, a settee, a wardrobe cabinet, two windows in the back, entrances left and right.*

*As the curtain rises, Clement, dressed in a modish, tarnished-gray sack suit, is discovered reclining in a fauteuil near the fireplace. He is smoking a cigarette and perusing a newspaper. Margaret is standing at the window. She walks back and forth, finally goes up directly behind Clement, and playfully musses his hair. Evidently she has something troublesome on her mind.]*

CLEM. [Reading, seizes her hand and kisses it.] Horner's certain about his pick and doubly certain about mine; Waterloo five to one; Barometer twenty-one to one; Busserl seven to one; Attilla sixteen to one.

MARG. Sixteen to one!

## COMEDIES OF WORDS

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CLEM. Lord Byron one and one-half to one — that's us, my dear.

MARG. I know.

CLEM. Besides, it's sixteen weeks yet to the Handicap.

MARG. Evidently he looks upon it as a clean "runaway."

CLEM. Not quite — but where did you pick up your turf-lingo, Brava?

MARG. Oh, I used this kind of talk before I knew you. Is it settled that you are to ride Lord Byron yourself?

CLEM. How absurd to ask! You forget, it's the Damenpreis Handicap. Whom else could I get to ride him? And if Horner thought for a moment that I wasn't going to ride him, he'd never put up one and a half to one. You may stake all you've got on that.

MARG. I'm well aware of that. You are *so* handsome when you mount a horse — honest and truly, too sweet for anything! I shall never forget that day in Munich, when I first made your acquaintance —

CLEM. Please do not remind me of it. I had rotten luck that day. But you can believe me, Windy would never have won if it weren't for the ten lengths he gained at the start. But this time — never! You know, of course, it is decided; we leave town the same day.

MARG. Same evening, you mean.

CLEM. If you will — but why?

MARG. Because it's been arranged we're to be married in the morning, hasn't it?

CLEM. Quite so.

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MARG. I am so happy. [*Embraces him.*] Now, where shall we spend our honeymoon?

CLEM. I take it we're agreed. Aren't we? On the estate.

MARG. Oh, of course, later. Aren't we going to take in the Riviera, as a preliminary tidbit?

CLEM. As for that, it all depends on the Handicap. If we win —

MARG. Surest thing!

CLEM. And besides, in April the Riviera's not at all good *ton*.

MARG. Is that your reason?

CLEM. Of course it is, my love. In your former way of life, there were so few opportunities for your getting a clear idea of fashion — Pardon me, but whatever there was, you must admit, really had its origin in the comic journals.

MARG. Clem, please!

CLEM. Well, well. We'll see. [*Continues reading.*] Badegast fifteen to one —

MARG. Badegast? There isn't a ghost of a show for him!

CLEM. Where did you get that information?

MARG. Szigrati himself gave me a tip.

CLEM. Where — and when?

MARG. Oh, this morning in the Fredenau, while you were talking with Milner.

CLEM. Now, look here; Szigrati isn't fit company for you.

MARG. Jealous?

CLEM. Not at all. Moreover, let it be understood that from now on I shall introduce you everywhere as my fiancée. [*Margaret kisses him.*]

## COMEDIES OF WORDS

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CLEM. Now, what did Szigrati say?

MARG. That he's not going to enter Badegast in the Handicap at all.

CLEM. Well, don't you believe everything Szigrati is likely to say. He's circulating the rumor that Badegast will not be entered so that the odds may be bigger.

✓ MARG. Nonsense! That's too much like an investment.

CLEM. So you don't believe there is such a thing as investment in this game? For a great many it's all a commercial enterprise. Do you think that a fellow of Szigrati's ilk cares a fig for sport? He might just as well speculate on the market, and wouldn't realize the difference. Any-way, as far as Badegast is concerned, one hundred to one wouldn't be too much to put up against him.

MARG. Really? I found him in first-rate fettle this morning.

CLEM. Then you saw Badegast, too?

MARG. Certainly. Didn't Butters put him through his paces, right behind Busserl?

CLEM. But Butters isn't riding for Szigrati. He was only a stableboy. Badegast can be in as fine fettle as he chooses — it's all the same to me. He's nothing but a blind. Some day, Margaret, with the aid of your exceptional talent, you will be able to distinguish the veritable somebodies from the shams. Really, it's remarkable with what proficiency you have, so to speak, insinuated yourself into all these things. You go beyond my expectations.

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MARG. [chagrined]. Pray, why do I go beyond your expectations? All this, as you know, is not so new to me. At our house we entertained very good people — Count Libowski and people of that sort — and at my husband's —

CLEM. Quite so. No question about that. As a matter of principle, you realize, I've no grudge against the cotton industry.

MARG. Even if my husband happened to be the owner of a cotton mill, that didn't have to effect my personal outlook on life, did it? I always sought culture in my own way. Now, don't let's talk of that period of my life. It's dead and buried, thank heaven!

CLEM. Yes. But there's another period which lies nearer.

MARG. I know. But why mention it?

CLEM. Well, I simply mean that you couldn't possibly have heard much about sportsmanship from your friends in Munich — at least, as far as I am able to judge.

MARG. I do hope you will stop tormenting me about those friends in whose company you first made my acquaintance.

CLEM. Tormenting you? Nonsense! Only it's incomprehensible to me how you ever got amongst those people.

✓MARG. You speak of them as if they were a gang of criminals.

CLEM. Dearest, I'd stake my honor on it, some of them looked the very picture of pickpockets. Tell me, how did you manage to do it? I can't understand how you, with your refined

## COMEDIES OF WORDS

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taste — let alone your purity and the scent you used — could have tolerated their society. How could you have sat at the same table with them?

MARG. [*laughing*]. Didn't you do the same?

CLEM. Next to them — not with them. And for your sake — merely for your sake, as you know. To do them justice, however, I will admit that many bettered upon closer acquaintance. There were some interesting people among them. You mustn't for a moment believe, dearest, that I hold myself superior to those who happen to be shabbily dressed. That's nothing against them. But there was something in their conduct, in their manners, which was positively revolting.

MARG. It wasn't quite so bad.

CLEM. Don't take offense, dear. I said there were some interesting people among them. But that a lady should feel at ease in their company, for any length of time, I cannot and do not pretend to understand.

MARG. You forget, dear Clem, that in a sense I'm one of them — or was at one time.

CLEM. Now, please! For my sake!

MARG. They were artists.

CLEM. Thank goodness, we've returned to the old theme.

MARG. Yes, because it hurts me to think you always lose sight of that fact.

CLEM. Lose sight of that fact! Nonsense! You know what pained me in your writings — things entirely personal.

MARG. Let me tell you, Clem, there are

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women who, in my situation, would have done worse than write poetry.

CLEM. But what sort of poetry! What sort of poetry! [Takes a slender volume from the mantel-shelf.] That's what repels me. I assure you, every time I see this book lying here; every time I think of it, I blush with shame that it was you who wrote it.

MARG. That's why you fail to understand — Now, don't take offense. If you did understand, you'd be quite perfect, and that, obviously, is impossible. Why does it repel you? You know I didn't live through all the experiences I write about.

CLEM. I hope not.

MARG. The poems are only visions.

CLEM. That's just it. That's what makes me ask: How can a lady indulge in visions of that character? [Reads.] "Abandoned on thy breast and suckled by thy lips" [shaking his head]. How can a lady write such stuff — how can a lady have such stuff printed? That's what I simply cannot make out. Everybody who reads will inevitably conjure up the person of the authoress, and the particular breast mentioned, and the particular abandonment hinted at.

MARG. But, I'm telling you, no such breast ever existed.

CLEM. I can't bring myself to imagine that it did. That's lucky for both of us, Margaret. But where did these visions originate? These glowing passion-poems could not have been inspired by your first husband. Besides, he could never appreciate you, as you yourself always say.

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MARG. Certainly not. That's why I brought suit for divorce. You know the story. I just couldn't bear living with a man who had no other interest in life than eating and drinking and cotton.

CLEM. I dare say. But that was three years ago. These poems were written later.

MARG. Quite so. But consider the position in which I found myself —

CLEM. What do you mean? You didn't have to endure any privation? In this respect you must admit your husband acted very decently toward you. You were not under the necessity of earning your own living. And suppose the publishers did pay you one hundred gulden for a poem — surely, they don't pay more than that — still, you were not bound to write a book of this sort.

MARG. I did not refer to position in a material sense. It was the state of my soul. Have you a notion how — when you came to know me — things were considerably improved. I had in many ways found myself again. But in the beginning! I was so friendless, so crushed! I tried my hand at everything; I painted, I gave English lessons in the pension where I lived. Just think of it! A divorcee, having nobody —

CLEM. Why didn't you stay in Vienna?

MARG. Because I couldn't get along with my family. No one appreciated me. Oh, what people! Did any one of them realize that a woman of my type asks more of life than a husband, pretty dresses and social position?. My God! If I had had a child, probably everything would have ended differently — and maybe not. I'm not quite lacking in accomplishments, you know. Are



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you still prepared to complain? Was it not for the best that I went to Munich? Would I have made your acquaintance else?

CLEM. You didn't go there with that object in view.

MARG. I wanted to be free spiritually, I mean. I wanted to prove to myself whether I could succeed through my own efforts. And, admit, didn't it look as if I was jolly well going to? I had made some headway on the road to fame.

CLEM. H'm!

MARG. But you were dearer to me than fame.

CLEM [*good-naturedly*]. And surer.

MARG. I didn't give it a thought. I suppose it's because I loved you from the very start. For in my dreams, I always conjured up a man of your likeness. I always seemed to realize that it could only be a man like you who would make me happy. Blood — is no empty thing. Nothing whatever can weigh in the balance with that. You see, that's why I can't resist the belief —

CLEM. What?

MARG. Oh, sometimes I think I must have blue blood in my veins, too.

CLEM. How so?

MARG. It's not improbable?

CLEM. I'm afraid I don't understand.

MARG. But I told you that members of the nobility were entertained at our house —

CLEM. Well, and if they were?

MARG. Who knows —

CLEM. Margaret, you're positively shocking. How can you hint at such a thing!

MARG. I can never say what I think in your

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presence! That's your only shortcoming—otherwise you would be quite perfect. [*She smiles up to him.*] You've won my heart completely. That very first evening, when you walked into the café with Wangenheim, I had an immediate presentiment: this is he! You came among that group, like a soul from another world.

CLEM. I hope so. And I thank heaven that somehow you didn't seem to be altogether one of them, either. No. Whenever I call to mind that junto — the Russian girl, for instance, who because of her close-cropped hair gave the appearance of a student — except that she did not wear a cap —

MARG. Baranzewitsch is a very gifted painter.

CLEM. No doubt. You pointed her out to me one day in the picture gallery. She was standing on a ladder at the time, copying. And then the fellow with the Polish name —

MARG. [*beginning*]. Zrkd —

CLEM. Spare yourself the pains. You don't have to use it now any more. He read something at the café while I was there, without putting himself out the least bit.

MARG. He's a man of extraordinary talent. I'll vouch for it.

CLEM. Oh, no doubt. Everybody is talented at the café. And then that yokel, that insufferable —

MARG. Who?

CLEM. You know whom I mean. That fellow who persisted in making tactless observations about the aristocracy.

MARG. Gilbert. You must mean Gilbert.

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CLEM. Yes. Of course. I don't feel called upon to make a brief for my class. Profligates crop up everywhere, even among writers, I understand. But, don't you know it was very bad taste on his part while one of us was present?

MARG. That's just like him.

CLEM. I had to hold myself in check not to knock him down.

MARG. In spite of that, he was quite interesting. And, then, you mustn't forget he was raving jealous of you.

CLEM. I thought I noticed that, too.  
[Pause.]

MARG. Good heavens, they were all jealous of you. Naturally enough — you were so unlike them. They all paid court to me because I wouldn't discriminate in favor of any one of them. You certainly must have noticed that, eh? Why are you laughing?

CLEM. Comical — is no word for it! If some one had prophesied to me that I was going to marry a regular frequenter of the Café Maximilian — I fancied the two young painters most. They'd have made an incomparable vaudeville team. Do you know, they resembled each other so much and owned everything they possessed in common — and, if I'm not mistaken, the Russian on the ladder along with the rest.

MARG. I didn't bother myself with such things.

CLEM. And, then, both must have been Jews?

MARG. Why so?

CLEM. Oh, simply because they always jested in such a way. And their enunciation.

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MARG. You may spare your anti-Semitic remarks.

CLEM. Now, sweetheart, don't be touchy. I know that your blood is not untainted, and I have nothing whatever against the Jews. I once had a tutor in Greek who was a Jew. Upon my word! He was a capital fellow. One meets all sorts and conditions of people. I don't in the least regret having made the acquaintance of your associates in Munich. It's all in the weave of our life experience. But I can't help thinking that I must have appeared to you like a hero come to rescue you in the nick of time.

MARG. Yes, so you did. My Clem! Clem!  
[Embraces him.]

CLEM. What are you laughing at?

MARG. Something's just occurred to me.

CLEM. What?

MARG. "Abandoned on thy breast and—"

CLEM. [vexed]. Please! Must you always shatter my illusions?

MARG. Tell me truly, Clem, wouldn't you be proud if your fiancée, your wife, were to become a great, a famous writer?

CLEM. I have already told you. I am rooted in my decision. And I promise you that if you begin scribbling or publishing poems in which you paint your passion for me, and sing to the world the progress of our love — it's all up with our wedding, and off I go.

MARG. You threaten — you, who have had a dozen well-known affairs.

CLEM. My dear, well-known or not, I didn't tell anybody. I didn't bring out a book whenever

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a woman abandoned herself on my breast, so that any Tom, Dick or Harry could buy it for a gulden and a half. There's the rub. I know there are people who thrive by it, but, as for me, I find it extremely coarse. It's more degrading to me than if you were to pose as a Greek goddess in flesh-colored tights at Ronacher's. A Greek statue like that doesn't say "Mew." But a writer who makes copy of everything goes beyond the merely humorous.

MARG. [nervously]. Dearest, you forget that the poet does not always tell the truth.

CLEM. And suppose he only vaporizes. Does that make it any better?

MARG. It isn't called vaporizing; it's "*distillation*."

CLEM. What sort of an expression is that?

MARG. We disclose things we never experienced, things we dreamed — plainly invented.

CLEM. Don't say "we" any more, Margaret. Thank goodness, that is past.

MARG. Who knows?

CLEM. What?

MARG. [tenderly]. Clement, I must tell you all.

CLEM. What is it?

MARG. It is not past; I haven't given up my writing.

CLEM. Why?

MARG. I'm still going on with my writing, or, rather, I've finished writing another book. Yes, the impulse is stronger than most people realize. I really believe I should have gone to pieces if it hadn't been for my writing.

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CLEM. What have you written now?

MARG. A novel. The weight was too heavy to be borne. It might have dragged me down — down. Until today, I tried to hide it from you, but it had to come out at last. Künigel is immensely taken with it.

CLEM. Who's Künigel?

MARG. My publisher.

CLEM. Then it's been read already.

MARG. Yes, and lots more will read it. Clement, you will have cause to be proud, believe me.

CLEM. You're mistaken, my dear. I think — but, tell me, what's it about?

MARG. I can't tell you right off. The novel contains the greatest part, so to speak, and all that can be said of the greatest part.

CLEM. My compliments!

MARG. That's why I'm going to promise you never to pick up a pen any more. I don't need to.

CLEM. Margaret, do you love me?

MARG. What a question! You and you only. Though I have seen a great deal, though I have gadded about a great deal, I have experienced comparatively little. I have waited all my life for your coming.

CLEM. Well, let me have the book.

MARG. Why — why? What do you mean?

CLEM. I grant you, there was some excuse in your having written it; but it doesn't follow that it's got to be read. Let me have it, and we'll throw it into the fire.

MARG. Clem!

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CLEM. I make that request. I have a right to make it.

MARG. Impossible! It simply —

CLEM. Why? If I wish it; if I tell you our whole future depends on it. Do you understand? Is it still impossible?

MARG. But, Clement, the novel has already been printed.

CLEM. What! Printed?

MARG. Yes. In a few days it will be on sale on all the book-stalls.

CLEM. Margaret, you did all that without a word to me —?

MARG. I couldn't do otherwise. When once you see it, you will forgive me. More than that, you will be proud.

CLEM. My dear, this has progressed beyond a joke.

MARG. Clement!

CLEM. Adieu, Margaret.

MARG. Clement, what does this mean? You are leaving?

CLEM. As you see.

MARG. When are you coming back again?

CLEM. I can't say just now. Adieu.

MARG. Clement! [Tries to hold him back.]

CLEM. Please. [Goes out.]

MARG. [alone]. Clement! What does this mean? He's left me for good. What shall I do? Clement! Is everything between us at an end? No. It can't be. Clement! I'll go after him. [She looks for her hat. The doorbell rings.] Ah, he's coming back. He only wanted

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to frighten me. Oh, my Clement! [Goes to the door. *Gilbert enters.*]

GIL. [to the maid]. I told you so. Madame's at home. How do you do, Margaret?

MARG. [astonished]. You?

GIL. It's I — I. Amandus Gilbert.

MARG. I'm so surprised.

GIL. So I see. There's no cause for it. I merely thought I'd stop over. I'm on my way to Italy. I came to offer you my latest book for auld lang syne. [Hands her the book. *As she does not take it, he places it on the table.*]

MARG. It's very good of you. Thanks!

GIL. You have a certain proprietorship in that book. So you are living here?

MARG. Yes, but —

GIL. ~~Opposite the stadium,~~ I see. As far as furnished rooms go, it's passable enough. But these family portraits on the walls would drive me crazy.

MARG. My housekeeper's the widow of a general.

GIL. Oh, you needn't apologize.

MARG. Apologize! Really, the idea never occurred to me.

GIL. It's wonderful to hark back to it now

MARG. To what?

GIL. Why shouldn't I say it? To the small room in Steinsdorf street, with its balcony abutting over the Isar. Do you remember, Margaret?

MARG. Suppose we drop the familiar.

GIL. As you please — as you please. [Pause,

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*then suddenly.]* You acted shamefully, Margaret.

MARG. What do you mean?

GIL. Would you much rather that I beat around the bush? I can find no other word, to my regret. And it was so uncalled for, too. Straightforwardness would have done just as nicely. It was quite unnecessary to run away from Munich under cover of a foggy night.

MARG. It wasn't night and it wasn't foggy. I left in the morning on the eight-thirty train, in open daylight.

GIL. At all events, you might have said good-bye to me before leaving, eh? [Sits.]

MARG. I expect the Baron back any minute.

GIL. What difference does that make? Of course, you didn't tell him that you lay in my arms once and worshipped me. I'm just an old acquaintance from Munich. And there's no harm in an old acquaintance calling to see you?

MARG. Anybody but you.

GIL. Why? Why do you persist in misunderstanding me? I assure you, I come *only* as an old acquaintance. Everything else is dead and buried, long dead and buried. Here. See for yourself. [*Indicates the book.*]

MARG. What's that?

GIL. My latest novel.

MARG. Have you taken to writing novels?

GIL. Certainly.

MARG. Since when have you learned the trick?

GIL. What do you mean?

MARG. Heavens, can't I remember? Thumb-

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nail sketches were your specialty, observation of daily events.

GIL. [excitedly]. My specialty? My specialty is life itself. I write what suits me. I do not allow myself to be circumscribed. I don't see who's to prevent my writing a novel.

MARG. But the opinion of an authority was —

GIL. Pray, who's an authority?

MARG. I call to mind, for instance, an article by Neumann in the "Algemeine" —

GIL. [angrily]. Neumann's a blamed idiot! I boxed his ears for him once.

MARG. You —

GIL. In effigy — But you were quite as much wrought up about the business as I at that time. We were perfectly agreed that Neumann was a blamed idiot. "How can such a numbskull dare" — these were your very words — "to set bounds to your genius? How can he dare to stifle your next work still, so to speak, in the womb?" You said that! And today you quote that literary hawker!

✓ MARG. Please do not shout. My housekeeper —

GIL. I don't propose to bother myself about the widows of defunct generals when every nerve in my body is a-tingle.

MARG. What did I say? I can't account for your touchiness.

GIL. Touchiness! You call me touchy? You! Who used to be seized with a violent fit of trembling every time some insignificant booby on some trumpery sheet happened to utter an unfavorable word of criticism.

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MARG. I don't remember one word of unfavorable criticism against me.

GIL. H'm! I dare say you may be right. Critics are always chivalrous toward beautiful women.

MARG. Chivalrous? Do you think my poems were praised out of chivalry? What about your own estimate —

GIL. Mine? I'm not going to retract so much as one little word. I simply want to remind you that you composed your sheaf of lovely poems while we were living together.

MARG. And you actually consider yourself worthy of them?

GIL. Would you have written them if it weren't for me? They are addressed to me.

MARG. Never!

GIL. What! Do you mean to deny that they are addressed to me? This is monstrous!

MARG. No. They are not addressed to you.

GIL. I am dumbfounded. Shall I remind you of the situations in which some of your loveliest verses had birth?

MARG. They were inscribed to an Ideal — [Gilbert points to himself] — whose representative on earth you happened to be.

GIL. Ha! This is precious. Where did you get that? Do you know what the French would say in a case like that? "C'est de la littérature!"

MARG. [mimicking him]. Ce n'est pas de la littérature! Now, that's the truth, the honest truth! Or do you really fancy that by the "slim

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boy" I meant you? Or that the curls I hymned belonged to you? At that time you were fat and your hair was never curly. [Runs her fingers through his hair. *Gilbert seizes the opportunity to capture her hand and kiss it.*]. What an ideal

GIL. At that time you pictured it so; or, at all events, that is what you called it. To be sure, a poet is forced to take every sort of license for the sake of the rythm. Didn't I once apostrophise you in a sonnet as "my canny lass"? In point of fact, you were neither — no, I don't want to be unfair — you were canny, shamefully canny, perversely canny. And it suited you perfectly. Well, I suppose I really oughtn't wonder at you. You were at all times a snob. And, by Jove! you've attained your end. You have decoyed your blue-blooded boy with his well-manicured hands and his unmanicured brain, your matchless horseman, fencer, marksman, tennis player, heart-trifler — Marlitt could not have invented him more revolting than he actually was. Yes, what more can you wish? Whether he will satisfy you — who are acquainted with something nobler — is, of course, another question. I can only say that, in my view, you are degenerate in love.

MARG. That must have struck you on the train.

GIL. Not at all. It struck me this very moment.

MARG. Make a note of it then; it's an apt phrase.

GIL. I've another quite as apt. Formerly you were a woman; now you're a "sweet thing." Yes, that's it. What attracted you to a man

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of that type? Passion — frank and filthy passion —

MARG. Stop! You have a motive —

GIL. My dear, I still lay claim to the possession of a soul.

MARG. Except now and then.

GIL. Please don't try to disparage our former relations. It's no use. They are the noblest experiences you've ever had.

MARG. Heavens, when I think that I endured this twaddle for one whole year I —

GIL. Endure? You were intoxicated with joy. Don't try to be ungrateful. I'm not. Admitting that you behaved never so execrably at the end, yet I can't bring myself to look upon it with bitterness. It had to come just that way.

MARG. Indeed!

GIL. I owe you an explanation. This: at the moment when you were beginning to drift away from me, when homesickness for the stables gripped you — *la nostalgie de l'écurie* — at that moment I was done with you.

MARG. Impossible.

GIL. You failed to notice the least sign in your characteristic way. I was done with you. To be plain, I didn't need you any longer. What you had to give you gave me. Your uses were fulfilled. In the depths of your soul you knew, unconsciously you knew —

MARG. Please don't get so hot.

GIL. [unruffled]. That our day was over. Our relations had served their purpose. I don't regret having loved you.

MARG. I do!

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GIL. Capital! This measly outburst must reveal to a person of any insight just one thing: the essential line of difference between the artist and the dilettante. To you, Margaret, our *liaison* means nothing more than the memory of a few abandoned nights, a few heart-to-heart talks in the winding ways of the English gardens. But *I* have made it over into a work of art.

MARG. So have I!

GIL. Eh? What do you mean?

MARG. I have done what you have done. I, too, have written a novel in which our relations are depicted. I, too, have embalmed our love — or what we thought was our love — for all time.

GIL. If I were you, I wouldn't talk of "for all time" before the appearance of the second edition.

MARG. Your writing a novel and my writing a novel are two different things.

GIL. Maybe.

MARG. You are a free man. You don't have to steal your hours devoted to artistic labor. And your future doesn't depend on the throw.

GIL. And you?

MARG. That's what I've done. Only a half hour ago Clement left me because I confessed to him that I had written a novel.

GIL. Left you — for good?

MARG. I don't know. But it isn't unlikely. He went away in a fit of anger. What he'll decide to do I can't say.

GIL. So he objects to your writing, does he? He can't bear to see his mistress put her intelligence to some use. Capital! And he represents

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the blood of the country! H'm! And you, you're not ashamed to give yourself up to the arms of an idiot of this sort, whom you once —

MARG. Don't you speak of him like that. You don't know him.

GIL. Ah!

MARG. You don't know why he objects to my writing. Purely out of love. He feels that if I go on I will be living in a world entirely apart from him. He blushes at the thought that I should make copy of the most sacred feelings of my soul for unknown people to read. It is his wish that I belong to him only, and that is why he dashed out — no, not dashed out — for Clement doesn't belong to the class that dashes out.

GIL. Your observation is well taken. In any case, he went away. We will not undertake to discuss the *tempo* of his going forth. And he went away because he could not bear to see you surrender yourself to the creative impulse.

MARG. Ah, if he could only understand that! But, of course, that can never be. I could be the best, the faithfulest, the noblest woman in the world if the right man only existed.

GIL. At all events, you admit he is not the right man.

MARG. I never said that!

GIL. But you ought to realize that he's fettering you, undoing you utterly, seeking through egotism, to destroy your inalienable self. Look back for a moment at the Margaret you were; at the freedom that was yours while you loved me. Think of the younger set who gathered about me and who belonged no whit less to you? Do you

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never long for those days? Do you never call to mind the small room with its balcony — Beneath us plunged the Isar — [He seizes her hand and presses her near.]

MARG. Ah!

GIL. All's not beyond recall. It need not be the Isar, need it? I have something to propose to you, Margaret. Tell him, when he returns, that you still have some important matters to arrange at Munich, and spend the time with me. Margaret, you are so lovely! We shall be happy again as then. Do you remember [*very near her*] "Abandoned on thy breast and —"

MARG. [*retreating brusquely from him*]. Go, go away. No, no. Please go away. I don't love you any more.

GIL. Oh, h'm — indeed! Oh, in that case I beg your pardon. [Pause.] Adieu, Margaret.

MARG. Adieu.

GIL. Won't you present me with a copy of your novel as a parting gift, as I have done?

MARG. It hasn't come out yet. It won't be on sale before next week.

GIL. Pardon my inquisitiveness, what kind of a story is it?

MARG. The story of my life. So veiled, to be sure, that I am in no danger of being recognized.

GIL. I see. How did you manage to do it?

MARG. Very simply. For one thing, the heroine is not a writer but a painter.

GIL. Very clever.

MARG. Her first husband is not a cotton manufacturer, but a big financier, and, of course,

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it wouldn't do to deceive him with a tenor —

GIL. Ha! Ha!

MARG. What strikes you so funny?

GIL. So you deceived him with a tenor? I didn't know that.

MARG. Whoever said so?

GIL. Why, you yourself, just now.

MARG. How so? I say the heroine of the book deceives her husband with a baritone.

GIL. Bass would have been more sublime, mezzo-soprano more piquant.

MARG. Then she doesn't go to Munich, but to Dresden; and there, has an affair with a sculptor.

GIL. That's me — veiled.

MARG. Very much veiled, I rather fear. The sculptor, as it happens, is young, handsome and a genius. In spite of that she leaves him.

GIL. For —

MARG. Guess?

GIL. A jockey, I fancy.

MARG. Wretch!

GIL. A count, a prince of the empire?

MARG. Wrong. An archduke.

GIL. I must say you have spared no costs.

MARG. Yes, an archduke, who gave up the court for her sake, married her and emigrated with her to the Canary Islands.

GIL. The Canary Islands! Splendid! And then —

MARG. With the disembarkation —

GIL. In Canaryland.

MARG. The story ends.

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GIL. Good. I'm very much interested, especially in the veiling.

MARG. You yourself wouldn't recognize me were it not for —

GIL. What?

MARG. The third chapter from the end, where our correspondence is published entire.

GIL. What?

MARG. Yes, all the letters you sent me and those I sent you are included in the novel.

GIL. I see, but may I ask where you got those you sent me? I thought I had them.

MARG. I know. But, you see, I had the habit of always making a rough draft.

GIL. A rough draft?

MARG. Yes.

GIL. A rough draft! Those letters which seemed to have been dashed off in such tremendous haste. "Just one word, dearest, before I go to bed? My eyelids are heavy —" and when your eyelids were closed you wrote the whole thing over again.

MARG. Are you piqued about it?

GIL. I might have expected as much. I ought to be glad, however, that they weren't bought from a professional love-letter writer. Oh, how everything begins to crumble! The whole past is nothing but a heap of ruins. She made a rough draft of her letters!

MARG. Be content. Maybe my letters will be all that will remain immortal of your memory.

GIL. And along with them will remain the fatal story.

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MARG. Why?

GIL. [*indicating his book*]. Because they also appear in my book.

MARG. In *where*?

GIL. In my novel.

MARG. What?

GIL. Our letters — yours and mine.

MARG. Where did you get your own? I've got them in my possession. Ah, so you, too, made a rough draft?

GIL. Nothing of the kind! I only copied them before mailing. I didn't want to lose them. There are some in my book which you didn't even get. They were, in my opinion, too beautiful for you. You wouldn't have understood them at all.

MARG. Merciful heavens! If this is so — [*turning the leaves of Gilbert's book*]. Yes, yes, it is so. Why, it's just like telling the world that we two — Merciful heavens! [*Feverishly turning the leaves.*.] Is the letter you sent me the morning after the first night also —

GIL. Surely. That was brilliant.

MARG. This is horrible. Why, this is going to create a European sensation. And Clement — My God; I'm beginning to hope that he will not come back. I am ruined! And you along with me. Wherever you are, he'll be sure to find you and blow your brains out like a mad dog.

GIL. [*pocketing his book*]. Insipid comparison!

MARG. How did you hit upon such an insane idea? To publish the correspondence of a woman whom, in all sincerity, you professed to have loved! Oh, you're no gentleman.

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GIL. Quite charming. Haven't you done the same?

MARG. I'm a woman.

GIL. Do you take refuge in that now?

MARG. Oh, it's true. I have nothing to reproach you with. We were made for one another. Yes, Clement was right. We're worse than those women who appear in flesh-colored tights. Our most sacred feelings, our pangs — everything — we make copy of everything. Pfui! Pfui! It's sickening. We two belong to one another. Clement would only be doing what is right if he drove me away. [Suddenly.] Come, Amandus.

GIL. What is it?

MARG. I accept your proposal.

GIL. What proposal?

MARG. I'm going to cut it with you. [Looks for her hat and cloak.]

GIL. Eh? What do you mean?

MARG. [very much excited; puts her hat on tightly]. Everything can be as it was. You've said it. It needn't be the Isar — well, I'm ready.

GIL. Sheer madness! Cut it — what's the meaning of this? Didn't you yourself say a minute ago that he'd find me anywhere. If you're with me, he'll have no difficulty in finding you, too. Wouldn't it be better if each —

MARG. Wretch! Now you want to leave me in a lurch! Why, only a few minutes ago you were on your knees before me. Have you no conscience?

GIL. What's the use? I am a sick, nervous

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man, suffering from hypochondria. [Margaret at the window utters a cry.]

GIL. What's up? What will the general's widow think?

MARG. It's he. He's coming back.

GIL. Well, then —

MARG. What? You intend to go?

GIL. I didn't come here to pay the baron a visit.

MARG. He'll encounter you on the stairs. That would be worse. Stay. I refuse to be sacrificed alone.

GIL. Now, don't lose your senses. Why do you tremble like that? It's quite absurd to believe that he's already gone through both novels. Calm yourself. Remove your hat. Off with your cloak. [Assists her.] If he catches you in this frame of mind he can't help but suspect.

MARG. It's all the same to me. Better now than later. I can't bear waiting and waiting for the horrible event. I'm going to tell him everything right away.

GIL. Everything?

MARG. Yes. And while you are still here. If I make a clean breast of everything now maybe he'll forgive me.

GIL. And me — what about me? I have a higher mission in the world, I think, than to suffer myself to be shot down like a mad dog by a jealous baron. [The bell rings.]

MARG. It's he! It's he.

GIL. Understand, you're not to breathe a word.

MARG. I've made up my mind.

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GIL. Indeed, have a care. For, if you do, I shall sell my hide at a good price. I shall hurl such naked truths at him that he'll swear no baron heard the like of them.

CLEM. [entering, somewhat surprised, but quite cool and courteous]. Oh, Mr. Gilbert! Am I right?

GIL. The very same, Baron. I'm travelling south, and I couldn't repress the desire to pay my respects to madame.

CLEM. Ah, indeed. [Pause.] Pardon me, it seems I've interrupted your conversation. Pray, don't let me disturb you.

GIL. What were we talking about just now?

CLEM. Perhaps I can assist your memory. In Munich, if I recall correctly, you always talked about your books.

GIL. Quite so. As a matter of fact, I was speaking about my new novel.

CLEM. Pray, continue. Nowadays, I find that I, too, can talk literature. Eh, Margaret? Is it naturalistic? Symbolic? Autobiographical? Or — let me see — is it distilled?

GIL. Oh, in a certain sense we all write about our life-experiences.

CLEM. H'm. That's good to know.

GIL. Yes, if you're painting the character of Nero, in my opinion it's absolutely necessary that you should have set fire to Rome —

CLEM. Naturally.

GIL. From what source should a writer derive his inspiration if not from himself? Where should he go for his models if not to the life which

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is nearest to him? [Margaret becomes more and more uneasy.]

CLEM. Isn't it a pity, though, that the models are so rarely consulted? But I must say, if I were a woman, I'd think twice before I'd let such people know anything — [Sharply.] In decent society, sir, that's the same as compromising a woman!

GIL. I don't know whether I belong to decent society or not, but, in my humble opinion, it's the same as ennobling a woman.

CLEM. Indeed.

GIL. The essential thing is, does it really hit the mark? In a higher sense, what does it matter if the public does know that a woman was happy in this bed or that?

CLEM. Mr. Gilbert, allow me to remind you that you are speaking in the presence of a lady.

GIL. I'm speaking in the presence of a comrade, Baron, who, perhaps, shares my views in these matters.

CLEM. Oh!

MARG. Clement! [Throws herself at his feet.] Clement!

CLEM [staggered]. But — Margaret.

MARG. Your forgiveness, Clement!

CLEM. But, Margaret. [To Gilbert.] It's very painful to me, Mr. Gilbert. Now, get up, Margaret. Get up, everything's all right; everything's arranged. Yes, yes. You have but to call up Künigel. I have already arranged everything with him. We are going to put it out for sale. Is that suitable to you?

GIL. What are you going to put out for sale,

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if I may be so bold as to ask? The novel madame has written?

CLEM. Ah, so you know already. At all events, Mr. Gilbert, it seems that your *camaraderie* is not required any further.

GIL. Yes. There's really nothing left for me but to beg to be excused. I'm sorry.

CLEM. I very much regret, Mr. Gilbert, that you had to witness a scene which might almost be called domestic.

GIL. Oh, I do not wish to intrude any further.

GIL. Madame — Baron, may I offer you a copy of my book as a token that all ill-feeling between us has vanished? As a feeble sign of my sympathy, Baron?

CLEM. You're very good, Mr. Gilbert. I must, however, tell you that this is going to be the last, or the one before the last, that I ever intend to read.

GIL. The one before the last?

CLEM. Yes.

MARG. And what's the last going to be?

CLEM. Yours, my love. [Draws an advance copy from his pocket.] I wheedled an advance copy from Künigel to bring to you, or, rather, to both of us. [Margaret and Gilbert exchange scared glances.]

MARG. How good of you! [Taking the book.] Yes, it's mine.

CLEM. We will read it together.

MARG. No, Clement, no. I cannot accept so much kindness. [She throws the book into the fireplace.] I don't want to hear of this sort of thing any more.

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GIL. [*very joyful*]. But, dear madame —

CLEM. [*going toward the fireplace*]. Margaret, what have you done?

MARG. [*in front of the fireplace, throwing her arms about Clement*]. Now, do you believe that I love you!

GIL. [*most gleeful*]. It appears that I'm entirely *de trop* here. Dear Madame — Baron — [To himself.] Pity, though, I can't stay for the last chapter. [Goes out.]

[CURTAIN.]

## HIS HELPMATE

### PERSONS

PROFESSOR ROBERT PILGRAM.  
DOCTER ALFRED HAUSMANN.  
PROFESSOR WERKMANN.  
PROFESSOR BRAND.  
OLGA MERHOLM.  
FRANZ, *manservant at Pilgram's summer residence.*

*The action takes place in a summer resort not far removed from Vienna, on an autumn evening in the year 1897.*

[SCENE: *An elegantly furnished room. The wall paper and furniture are light tinted; blue is the prevailing shade. On the left, down stage, a lady's escritoire stands; on the right, a piano. Left and right entrances facing each other. In the rear, a wide-open door giving on to a balcony. Through the door the audience is afforded an uninterrupted view of the landscape. A street, rising gradually, winds far in the distance until it is cut off by a cemetery wall. The wall is not very high, so that gravestones and crosses are visible above its crest. Far beyond loom haze-enshrouded*

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*mountain peaks, quite steep. The time is late evening — almost night.*

*The landscape is bathed in a soft gloom, and the moon has illumined the single street with its silver glow.*

*Robert enters from the right, escorting Professors Werkmann and Brand to the door.]*

ROB. Excuse me a moment, gentlemen, while I fetch a light. How dark it is here!

WERK. Much obliged, dear fellow. I guess we can find our way out.

ROB. It'll only take a minute. [Goes out; Werkmann and Brand remain motionless in the gloom.]

WERK. How lightly he seems to bear the blow.

BRAND. Merely a mask, my dear Werkmann; the comic mask.

WERK. I dare say; but when one's burying one's wife, the — er — comic —

BRAND. It is evident, my dear Werkmann, you know mighty little about Pilgram. Don't you perceive, it has a very dazzling effect on people. I mean this interment of one's wife in the afternoon, and atop of that a two-hour long discussion on scientific subjects in the evening. Why, you yourself were taken in by it.

WERK. A man has got to be a man, Brand.

[Enter Robert with a branched candlestick.

*Two candles are lit.]*

ROB. Here I am again, gentlemen. [The room is illuminated but faintly.]

WERK. Exactly where are we now?

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ROB. Oh, this was my poor wife's room. That small flight of stairs over there will take us to the garden gate and in five minutes you will be at the station.

BRAND. Is there any chance of our still making the nine o'clock train?

ROB. I think so. [*The door on the right is pushed open from without. Enter Franz with a wreath.*]

ROB. What is it?

FRANZ. This wreath has just come from the city, sir.

ROB. So late!

WERK. Probably one of your friends who got the news too late. It's not unusual, I assure you. Many more of these melancholy tokens will pour in; you'll see. Ah! I've gone through it all.

FRANZ. Where shall I put the wreath, sir?

ROB. [to Franz]: On the balcony.

[*Franz puts it as bidden, then goes out.*]

WERK. Your assistant, I understand, is away on his vacation?

ROB. Yes; but I expect him back ere long. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he returns tomorrow.

WERK. I suppose you'll arrange for his taking your place during the early part of the semester.

ROB. Not at all. I don't propose to give up my work.

WERK. [*grasping his hand*]. By Jove, that's fine! I'm fully convinced it's the only balm there is.

ROB. So it is. Even if work did not act in

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the way of a balm, to my mind, it is an open question still whether we are justified in shelving a slice of our brief existence. After we have been cowardly enough to survive the first staggering blow. [He precedes them in going out.]

WERK. [to Brand]. Proof positive, my dear Brand, he never entertained the least bit of affection for his wife.

BRAND [with a shrug]. H'm! [All go out, right. For a few minutes the stage remains empty. Olga enters from the left. She is clad in a dark evening costume without a hat. She casts off her light fur-lined mantle. Enter Franz from the balcony.]

FRANZ. Good evening, Frau Merholm.

OLGA. The professor — is in the garden, I suppose.

FRANZ. Yes, m'm, escorting two gentlemen — [Olga makes a sign to him as Robert enters without noticing her.]

ROB. [going toward the escritoire]. Franz, can you tell me when the last train from the city's due here?

FRANZ. Ten o'clock, sir.

ROB. H'm. [Pause.] Then we may still count on Dr. Hausmann's arrival this evening. If he should come, without further delay show him in to me.

FRANZ. Here?

ROB. If I should happen to be here at the time, yes. [Franz goes out. Robert sits down to the escritoire, about to unlock it.]

OLGA [advancing behind him]. Good evening.

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ROB. [surprised]. Olga! [Rises.]

OLGA [mastering her embarrassment with difficulty]. How I ached to grasp your hand this whole dreary day!

ROB. And I yours. I am grateful to you all the same, Olga. [Extends his hand.]

OLGA. Robert, you are indeed blessed with a great many friends; this day bore witness to the fact.

ROB. Yes. The last of them have just taken their leave.

OLGA. Pray, who can have stayed as late as this?

ROB. Brand and Werkmann — a pair of sniveling old wives! Just fancy the fellow is inconceivably proud he had the misfortune to lose his wife last year! He certainly speaks with the authority of a connoisseur in these things, the vain idiot! [Pause.] But fancy your leaving the villa unaccompanied!

OLGA. Do you think I'm afraid to cut across the fields alone?

ROB. No; but won't your husband be uneasy?

OLGA. On the contrary. He's under the impression I'm snug asleep up in my room. Besides, I very often take a stroll in the garden at a late hour —

ROB. Along our path, eh?

OLGA. Our — I suppose you refer to the one that winds in and out among the trellis vines?

ROB. I always think of that as belonging especially to you and me.

OLGA. I often take the air in it alone.

ROB. Yes, but not at night.

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OLGA. In the evening sometimes. It's only then that one can appreciate how lovely it really is.

ROB. What an air of indescribable repose it has!

OLGA [tenderly]. Hasn't it? That's just why you must make up your mind to visit us again — soon. You'll be cheerfuller up at our house than here.

ROB. Maybe so. [*Looks at her a moment, then turns his back to the audience.*] See! That was where we filed out. [*Olga nods.*] Can you realize that all this happened only a few hours ago? And can you — now at night — picture to your mind the afternoon sunlight playing over that dark road? Odd, indeed! I even seem to hear the rumbling of the carriages! [*Pause. He is very nervous and talks disconnectedly.*] You are right. There were a great many friends here. And, one must consider, all came from the city; that's quite a trip, you know. Did you see the wreath my students sent?

OLGA. Yes.

ROB. It was magnificent, wasn't it? And what expressions of sympathy generally! Several of my colleagues interrupted their vacations to be present. It is truly very — how shall I put it [*hesitates*] — amiable of them, don't you think?

OLGA. Quite the customary thing, I should say.

ROB. To be sure! But I keep asking myself whether at bottom my bereavement, taken all in all, is really deserving of this widespread sympathy — or expression of sympathy.

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OLGA [*quite shocked*]. How can you think that?

ROB. Because I suffer so little. I only know that she is no more. I am conscious of the bare fact with feelings so shockingly unequivocal that it tortures me to think of it; but within all is icy and transparent as the air on winter dawns.

OLGA. This feeling cannot last. The awakening pang will come — and that will be better for you in the end.

ROB. Who knows whether it *will* come? It all happened too long ago.

OLGA [*surprised*]. Too long ago! What happened too long ago?

ROB. The giving of herself — ourselves — to one another.

OLGA. Of course. But that is what usually happens in most marriages. [*She goes toward the balcony and suddenly spies the wreath.*]

ROB. Last to arrive. It's from Dr. Hausmann.

OLGA. Ah! [*She reads the card. Robert watches her closely. She is uneasy under his gaze.*]

OLGA. Has he arrived yet?

ROB. No. I telegraphed him at once to Scheveningen, and I would not be surprised to see him here — today yet. If when he arrives at Vienna he loses no time —

OLGA. I'm sure he won't.

ROB. Then he ought to be here in precisely one hour.

OLGA [*with forced confidence*]. What a great blow for him!

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ROB. No doubt. [*Pause, then quietly.*] Be candid with me, Olga. There is another reason for your coming here again today. I read it in your manner. Tell me, quite simply.

OLGA. It is more difficult than I imagined.

ROB. [*impatiently, but for all that master of himself.*] Well, well —

OLGA. I came to beg a favor of you.

ROB. If it's in my power.

OLGA. Easily. It affects certain letters which I wrote poor Eveline and which, if possible, I'd like to have back.

ROB. But why this haste?

OLGA. I thought that the first step you would naturally take would be —

ROB. What?

OLGA [*pointing to the escritoire.*]. The very one you were about to take when I entered. [*In a subdued tone of voice.*] I'd do it, too, if one I loved should — die.

ROB. [*slightly perturbed.*]. Loved — loved —

OLGA. Then one who was close to me. It helps to arouse in one's mind the image of the dead. [*She speaks the following like a passage got by rote.*] You see, my letters might have come to your notice first, and that is why I came. There are matters in them which must, by no means, be revealed to you; which were intended from one woman to another. Especially certain letters I wrote two or three years ago.

ROB. Where are they? Do you know where they have been put?

OLGA. If you'll only let me, I shall have no trouble in finding them.

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ROB. You wish to look for—

OLGA. It is the simplest way, I think, since I know where they are. However, if you wish you can unlock the drawer and I will tell you exactly—

ROB. Never mind; here's the key.

OLGA. Thanks. Pray don't regard me as secretive.

ROB. Oh, no!

OLGA. Some day I shall reveal all to you—I mean all that Eveline knew, even though it be at the risk of forfeiting your esteem. But thus, by chance, I wouldn't like to have you discover them.

ROB. I assure you, you will always command my esteem.

OLGA. Who knows? You know you have always overestimated me.

ROB. I cannot bring myself to believe that these letters contain something unknown to me. [Pause.] What's more, it isn't your own secrets you wish to preserve.

OLGA [*shrewdly*]. Whose, then?

ROB. The secrets of someone else.

OLGA. What makes you think so? Eveline had no secrets which you did not share.

ROB. I'm not inquisitive. You may take your letters.

OLGA [*unlocking the drawer and searching*]. Here they are! Yes. [She takes out a small package tied with a blue ribbon, holds it so that Robert cannot see. Finally she slyly tucks it under her wrap.] And now I must go. Good-by. [She turns to go.]

ROB. Wouldn't it be a good thing to glance

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into the other drawer as well? You know it needs but a hasty note to render all your precautions useless.

OLGA [*with less confidence*]. How useless?

ROB. You might have spared yourself all this trouble, Olga.

OLGA. What do you mean?

ROB. You above all, who were familiar with the relations between Eveline and myself.

OLGA. They were no worse than such relations ordinarily are after ten years. But I don't see how that concerns my letters.

ROB. And do you really believe that even ten years ago I cherished any illusions? That were simon pure simplicity when one marries a woman twenty years younger than oneself. I realized very clearly in the beginning that at best the future held but one or two perfect years for me. Yes, dear Olga, I was under no delusion regarding that. In my case this talk of illusions falls flat. Life is not long enough for us to reject even one year of happiness when it is offered to us. And, let me assure you, it is sufficient — at least as concerns our relations with women. I refer naturally to the women one adores. One soon tires of them. In life there are other things which have a greater hold on men.

OLGA. Possibly. But one doesn't always realize it.

ROB. I have never lost sight of it. She was never at any time the all-in-all of my life — never, even during that one year of happiness. In a certain sense, I grant you, she was more than that — the fragrance, if you will. But, as is to be ex-

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pected, the fragrance in time died out. But all this is useless. [*He speaks with more and more emotion in his voice, but outwardly gives the appearance of calmness.*] We had nothing in common, we two, but the memory of our short-lived happiness. And, take my word for it, this sort of common memory severs more often than it binds.

OLGA. I can conceive of it ending differently.

ROB. No doubt. But scarcely with a creature of Eveline's type. She was cut out to be a mistress; not a helpmate.

OLGA. Helpmate! That word's big with meaning. How many women do you know who are fit to be helpmates?

ROB. I never asked her to be one to me. To speak truth, I never felt lonely. A man who has a calling — I don't mean an occupation — can really never know the pangs of loneliness.

OLGA [*dispassionately*]. There in a nutshell is the great advantage you men possess — I mean men of your cut.

ROB. And when our happiness came to an end I again took up the thread of my life-work, concerning which she knew very little, as you are aware. I went my way and she went hers.

OLGA. No. It was not so. Ah, no!

ROB. Of course it was so. She's probably told you more than you are willing to own. As far as I am concerned this guarded abstraction of her letters is uncalled for. There are no surprises and no discoveries for me any more. What are you trying to do? You would gladly have me remain in darkness — no, envelope me

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in darkness. I know very well that I lost her a long time ago. Yes, a long time ago. [*With growing emotion.*] And do you for a moment believe that because all between us was dead, I gulled myself into thinking she was also cold to the joy of life; that she became an old woman simply because she had drifted away from me—or I had drifted away from her? I never entertained the notion.

OLGA. Really, Robert, I'm quite at a loss to account for your conjectures.

ROB. I know who wrote those letters. It was *not* you. I know, too, there is another who deserves to be pitied much more deeply than I; one whom she loved. And it was *he* who was bereaved of her today. No, not I; not I. You see, all this trouble was uncalled for. There can be no other.

OLGA. You are shockingly deceived.

ROB. Olga, let me beg you to tear off the mask at once. Otherwise I may be tempted to read those letters after all. [*Observing a rapid movement of Olga's.*] You needn't fear. I won't do it. Let us burn them before he arrives.

OLGA. Do you wish to do that?

ROB. Yes. For that was my intention before you came. Everything this *escritoire* contains I propose to throw into the fire without examination.

OLGA. No, I'm sure you would not have done it.

ROB. You needn't reproach yourself either. Perhaps it is for the best that I know everything without having to glance at the correspondence.

## COMEDIES OF WORDS

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Thus there is a complete understanding — and that is the single gift we ought to ask of life.

OLGA [*earnestly*]. You might have asked a great deal more.

ROB. Once — yes. And I would not have had to ask in vain. But now? She was young and I was old; that's the long and short of it. You and I can weigh affairs of this sort impartially in the case of others. Why not here? [*A locomotive whistles in the distance. Olga starts. Pause.*]

OLGA. For my sake, I beg you to receive him tomorrow.

ROB. Why? Do I not look calm? Do you honestly believe that I — There is just one thing that I must ask you to do for me. He must not learn that I know. If he did he'd interpret every word of mine in terms of forgiveness and magnanimity. I don't want that. It isn't true. I have never hated him; I do not hate him now. Why, there's absolutely no ground for hate — and none for forgiveness either. *She belonged to him.* Pray, let's not lose sight of that. Let us by all means avoid getting confused by external circumstances. *She belonged to him* — not me. The tension of their existence could not have lasted much longer.

OLGA. I implore you, Robert, do not receive him tonight.

ROB. You know very well she wanted to leave me.

OLGA. I?

ROB. Yes, for she confided in you.

OLGA. Oh, no!

## HIS HELPMATE

---

ROB. Then how did you know where those letters were?

OLGA. I happened to come in once while she was reading one aloud. I did not mean to eavesdrop, but —

ROB. But she had to have a confidante, that's very plain; and you could not help being hers; that's evident enough. No. Matters could not have continued this way very long. Do you think I was blind to the shame both endured because of their hypocrisy — and how they suffered? I was longing for the moment — yes, patiently awaiting it — when they would nerve themselves to come to me and say, "Free us!" Why didn't they find the courage? Why didn't I say to them, "You may go. I don't want to detain you." But we were all cowardly. To me that's the absurd side of life. We are eternally expecting some outer force to smite the shackles of the intolerable — an unknown something — which takes upon itself the pains for our being honest with one another. And soon it comes, this something, as with us. [Rumble of carriage wheels below. Brief silence. Olga is very much excited. Robert, externally calm, continues speaking.]

ROB. And one must admit, at any rate, it provides a capital solution. [The carriage stops.]

OLGA. You are going to receive him?

ROB. He must not see the letters.

OLGA. Let me go. I'll take them away with me.

ROB. Here, by these stairs —

## COMEDIES OF WORDS

---

OLGA. I hear his step.

ROB. He must have come through the garden then. [He takes the letters from her and hastily replaces them in the drawer.] Too late. Don't go. [Footsteps outside. Alfred rushes in. He wears a dark traveling suit. As he spies Olga he is just the least bit embarrassed. Robert makes as if to go toward him, but stops in an attitude of waiting after taking two steps. Alfred grasps his hand, then goes to Olga and offers her his. A brief silence.]

ALF. In my wildest dreams I did not picture our meeting again like this.

ROB. You didn't stop over in the city, did you?

ALF. No. I reckoned if I wanted to see you today — and I couldn't think of putting it off. [To Olga.] Oh, it's heartbreaking! Heartbreaking! How did it happen? I haven't been told yet. How? How? In a word tell me. [Robert does not reply.]

OLGA. It happened quite unexpectedly.

ALF. Heart failure?

ROB. Yes.

ALF. Without any previous symptoms?

ROB. Without any previous symptoms.

ALF. When and where?

ROB. The day before yesterday, while she was taking a turn in the garden. The gardener saw her stagger — near the pond. From my room I heard his cry. When I arrived on the spot all was over.

ALF. My poor fellow! How you must have

## HIS HELPMATE

---

suffered! I can't realize it all. So young and so beautiful!

OLGA. They are favored by heaven who are taken off that way.

ALF. That's no consolation.

ROB. I suppose you got my telegram rather late.

ALF. Yes; otherwise I might have been here earlier. If there were such things as presents —

OLGA. But there are none.

ALF. Quite so. The day was like any other. Possibly brighter and cheerfuller than usual —

ROB. Cheerfuller than usual?

ALF. Of course, I only imagined so. We were out sailing on the water. After that we went for a stroll along the beach in the cool twilight —

ROB. We?

ALF. Certainly; quite a lot of people; and when I returned to the hotel, in the dimness of my room I gazed out upon the sea. Then I got a light — and spied the telegram on the table. Ah! [Pause. *He covers his eyes with his hands while Olga watches Robert narrowly. Robert is gazing straight before him.*] ]

ALF. [removing his hand from his eyes]. This is her — [chokes] — room?

ROB. Yes.

ALF. How often have we sat there on the balcony! [Turning, he catches a glimpse of the cemetery wall at the end of the street. Tremulously.] There? [Robert nods.] In the morning we must visit her — you and I.

## COMEDIES OF WORDS

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ROB. You can offer your wreath there yourself. It has just come. [Pause.]

ALF. And what are your plans for the immediate future?

ROB. What do you mean?

OLGA. I've asked the professor to spend as much time as he can spare at the villa.

ALF. In any case he mustn't remain here. No, you must not remain on the spot.

ROB. I have planned to move to the city early in October. It isn't very long until then. Besides, I shall glance into the laboratory once or twice. The two Americans who were here last year have been at work since the end of August.

ALF. Yes, so you wrote me in your last letter. But you needn't return to the city for that. You're not going to buckle down to work right away, I hope.

ROB. You're simply preposterous, Alfred! What else can I do? I assure you I've no inclination to anything but work.

ALF. But you're not fit for it now.

ROB. You are no better than the rest in your advice. I feel myself perfectly fit. Why, I'm just longing for it!

ALF. I understand. But this longing is not to be trusted. I have a proposal to make. [Cordially.] Come away with me. You have granted me a few days more and I'm going to take you with me. What do you say to that, Frau Merholm?

OLGA. Not a bad idea, that.

ROB. You intend going away — now?  
You —

## HIS HELPMATE

---

ALF. Of course, I intend to ask for a few days more.

ROB. But where are you going?

ALF. To the seashore.

ROB. Back again?

ALF. Yes, but with you. It will do you a heap of good. Take my word for it. Eh, Frau Merholm?

OLGA. Oh, of course.

ALF. Now you come along with me to Scheveningen—I insist on it—and spend several days with us there.

ROB. "Us"? "Us"? Then you are not alone?

ALF. Of course I'm alone. But there are people at Scheveningen—who—[stammers]—

ROB. Well? [Pause.]

ALF. I didn't wish to announce the news until a few days yet, but since things have combined in such a way—in a word, I'm engaged to be married.

ROB. [quite coldly]. Ah!

ALF. It doesn't matter whether I announce it today or tomorrow, does it? Life still flows on. But it seems a little strange that it had to happen just—

ROB. I congratulate you!

ALF. Now you see why I said "with us" a moment ago, and you will understand now why I am impatient to return.

ROB. Perfectly.

ALF. But please come along. Her parents would be most delighted to make your acquaintance. I spoke so much about you. They're good

## COMEDIES OF WORDS

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people, besides. As for the girl — well, you'll judge when you see her.

ROB. Not now. I *may* find time later. [*He is successful in maintaining this studied calmness, but not without difficulty.*] This is quite a mad notion of yours — a trip to the seashore to be introduced to your fiancée. By the by, how many millions is she worth?

ALF. [pained]. What a question to ask! I give you my word, I'm not the type of man who marries for money.

ROB. So it's a *grande passion*, eh?

ALF. Let's not speak of it any more today. It's almost a — [*he almost says "sacrilege"*].

ROB. Why not? "Life still flows on," as you truthfully remarked. Let us talk of the living. How did you make her acquaintance?

ALF. She's Viennese.

ROB. Ah, now I know all!

ALF. Impossible!

ROB. Surely you recall you once related to me the story of your youthful student love for a girl with golden hair?

ALF. What's that to do with it?

ROB. Well, a chance meeting after many years, the awakening of the old passion, *and so on.*

ALF. How well you remember it! No, it is not she. I know my fiancée but two years, and it was for her sake that I chose the seashore for my vacation.

ROB. And there you fell in love with her.

ALF. Oh, I knew for ever so long that I was going to make her my wife.

ROB. Indeed!

## HIS HELPMATE

---

ALF. We've been secretly engaged one whole year.

ROB. And you scrupled to tell me — us — one word of it? Oh! —

ALF. There were several things to be taken into consideration. *Chiefly* her family. But *we* were decided all along. I might almost say that from the first moment we have been plighted in our affections.

ROB. Two years?

ALF. Yes.

ROB. As long as that?

ALF. Yes.

ROB. And — she?

ALF. [quite mechanically]. And she?

ROB. And that other — that other.

ALF. Whom do you mean?

ROB. [grasping his shoulder and pointing up the street]. She — yonder!

[Alfred casts a glance at Olga.]

ROB. To what end did she serve?

ALF. [after a pause, supporting himself]. Why have you been playing with me all this while? If you knew, why did you continue to treat me as a friend? If you knew — the law was in your hands. You could have done with me as you chose — anything. But one thing you had no right to do, and that was to play with me.

ROB. I did not play with you. If I had found you broken and disconsolate I should have lifted you from the depths of sorrow and despair; yes, I should even have visited her grave with you if I knew your love lay there. But you degraded her into an instrument of your lust and you have

## COMEDIES OF WORDS

---

besmirched with foulness and lies the sanctity of this house. That is what is so repulsive, and that is why I'm going to kick you out —

ALF. Calm yourself; I may be able to explain.

ROB. Clear out! Clear out! Clear out!

[Alfred goes.]

ROB. You wanted to spare me this. Now I understand. It was well for *her* that she died without an inkling — of what she really meant to him.

OLGA [*turning to him*]. Without an inkling?

ROB. What do you mean?

OLGA [*reflecting a moment*]. She — knew all.

ROB. What! What! She —

OLGA. Knew what she was to him. Don't you grasp it yet? He neither betrayed nor degraded her, and she was resigned to his marrying long ago as a matter of course. When he wrote her the news she wept as little over his loss — as he over hers. They would never have come to you for their freedom because the freedom they coveted they possessed in full.

ROB. She knew it? And you, you who are anxious to conceal the contents of those letters, answer —

OLGA. Am I not giving you back your freedom by doing so? For years and years you suffered at the hands of this woman plunging from one delusion to another, so that you might continue loving her and consequently suffering more. And now, when all is over, you wish to torture yourself still further for the sake of a calamity which is purely chimerical, over which this woman was incapable of suffering. Why? Because her

## HIS HELPMATE

---

outlook on life was so frivolous. Oh, you can scarcely understand.

ROB. And to think I should only realize it today! Now! Why didn't you, a witness of the whole affair, rouse me out of my ridiculous shortsightedness? Why didn't I know it a year ago? No, three days ago?

OLGA. I trembled at your awakening, as you yourself would have done in my place. It was well that you remained ignorant of the whole affair until today.

ROB. Does it make any difference because she is dead?

OLGA. No difference; but it is clear as it could never have been as long as she was alive. For her very existence, her very smile would have lent importance to this mere trumpery escapade. You could never have felt what you must feel today — anger, for the simple reason that she is beyond your anger. And it is freedom that rends the veil from your eyes. How removed, how infinitely removed from you, this woman lived her life, who, as chance would have it, breathed her last in this house. [She goes.]

[*Robert is silent for a space, then locks the escritoire, rises, goes to the door and calls.*]

ROB. Franz!

FRANZ. Yes, sir!

ROB. I leave tomorrow. Get my things ready and order a carriage for seven o'clock.

FRANZ. Very good, sir.

ROB. [*after a brief pause*]. I'll give you further instructions tomorrow. You may go to bed. [As Franz lingers]: Never mind; I'll lock the

## COMEDIES OF WORDS

---

room up myself. It is to stay shut until I return.

FRANZ. Very well, sir.

ROB. Good night.

FRANZ. Good night, sir.

[*Robert locks the door at once, then goes toward the balcony. As he is about to lock up he spies the wreath. He takes it and returns to the room with it and places it on the escritoire. Then, with the light in his hand, he goes to the door, left. On the threshold he pauses and turns, taking in the whole room with his eyes. He breathes deeply, as if relieved of a burden, then goes out. The dark room remains empty for a while, then*

[CURTAIN.]

THE END

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